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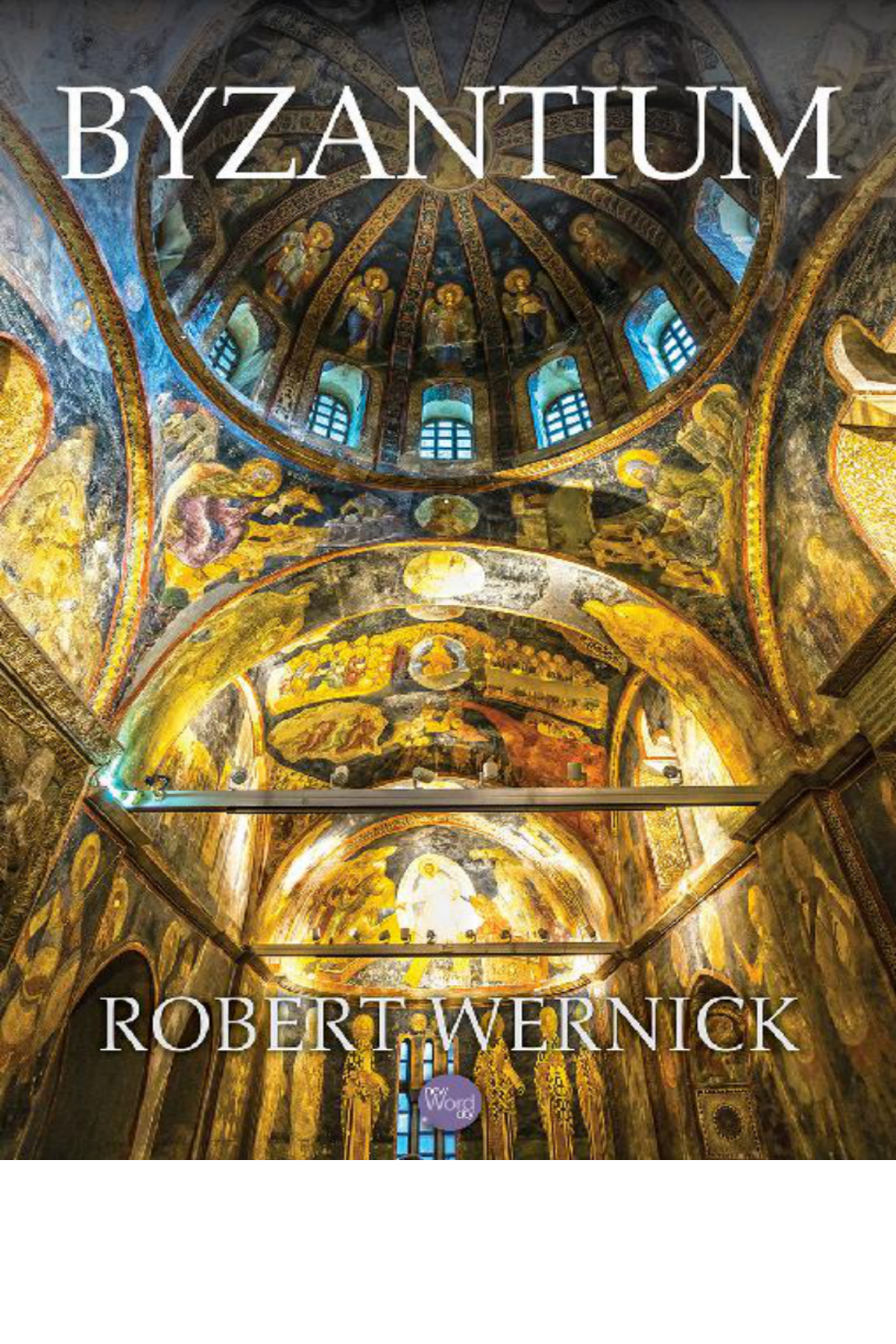
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ROME BY ANY
OTHER NAME

Between the heydays of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance lay the golden age of Byzantium. The Byzantine Empire, which endured for eleven centuries, formed a strategic bridge between the ancient and modern worlds. It not only preserved many elements of the Roman Empire - Roman law and state organization and the traditions of Hellenic culture, for example - but it added a third and even more powerful force: Christianity.

Byzantium has long remained shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. Historians in some parts of the world, specifically the Balkans and western Russia, continue to disregard Byzantium as a major source of their cultural lineage. Yet, it is to these sections of Europe more than any other that Byzantium, which fell to the Turks in 1453, bequeathed its rich heritage. The Orthodox Christian religion, the Cyrillic alphabet - indeed, Europeans' very way of life - stems from Byzantine origins.

Byzantium's most striking contributions to Eastern Europe and Western Asia are its brilliant mosaics and the architecture and engineering of its churches. These majestic structures, found on the twisted ridges of Yugoslavia, in the open valleys of Romania, and across the Syrian deserts owe their magnificence to the genius of the Byzantine builders.

Though Eastern Europe's debt to Byzantium may be obvious in Eastern Europe, it is more subtle in the West. The revival of Greek ideas during the Renaissance would have been virtually impossible if Byzantine scholars had not studied and preserved the ancient literature. Cathedrals from the reign of Charlemagne, like the one still standing at Aachen, Germany, share Byzantine decorative motifs, floor plans, and construction techniques; but these are usually considered Carolingian - features attributed to Charlemagne and his ancestors. Even the fork - the instrument central to Western dining - was introduced to Venetian society by a Byzantine princess.

In the minds of many Westerners, the Byzantines have faded into obscurity or come to be seen as grotesque figures in a bizarre Hollywood film. This is likely due to the Byzantine's fondness for preoccupations Westerners find peculiar: public spectacles, intrigue at court (including routine eye-gougings), and religious mysticism. Mystified by these activities, writers

such as Englishman William Lecky have concluded that the history of Byzantium was "a monotonous story of the intrigues of priests, eunuchs and women, of poisonings, of conspiracies, of uniform ingratitude, of perpetual fratricide."

Byzantine life may have had its strange and gruesome aspects, but beneath the oddities can be found surprising beauty, consistency and, above all, durability. Moreover, it possessed sufficient power and awe to unite the non-barbarian world. For these and other reasons, it is necessary to examine the forces that forged the Byzantine Empire: the decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity.

By the second half of the third century, the Roman Empire founded by Augustus scarcely 300 years before was facing disintegration. Augustus's imperial system had once been a masterpiece. At the time of his succession to power, Rome was the focal point of the Western world. Some looked to Rome for protection and leadership; some, fearing a challenge or threat to their authority, watched it apprehensively. Despite this commanding position, the Roman state was in turmoil. Governed by a system suitable to a city rather than an empire, it was wracked by internal strife. While preserving the Republic, Augustus created a strong authoritarian government that addressed the needs of empire yet recognized the age-old Roman aversion to autocracy and kingship.

At its inception, the Augustan system was surprisingly farsighted. But by the third century, the empire, now fraught with abuse of authority, a bumbling bureaucracy, a failing economy, civil wars, and barbarian raids, was close to the breaking point. The unstable political climate was demonstrated in CE 193, when the emperor, Pertinax, was murdered by the elite Praetorian Guard, which then auctioned off the emperorship to the highest bidder. The winner was Julianus, a wealthy senator who, according to a contemporary account, "was holding a drinking bout late that evening [when] his wife and daughters and fellow feasters urged him to rise from his banqueting couch and hasten to the barracks . . . on the way they pressed it

on him that he might get the sovereignty for himself and that he ought not to spare the money to outbid any competitors . . ." The Roman Empire was his.

Within months, however, Julianus himself was deposed and murdered, and by CE 235, anarchy had set in. In the next fifty years, there were twenty legitimate emperors, but dozens of usurpers ruled sections of the empire. The central government lost all authority: Power was held by the provincial armies whose loyalties were to their own commanders, not to the Empire. In the West, a general named Postumus seized Gaul and some of Spain and ruled the territories as a separate kingdom for nine years. In the East, Zenobia, widow of a Palmyran prince, conquered the Roman provinces in Asia Minor and then Egypt, the breadbasket of the empire. Though eventually defeated by Emperor Aurelian, her contempt for Rome, once the undisputed ruler of the known world, was revealed by her reply to the emperor's demand for surrender: "The Persians do not abandon us, and we will await their succors. The Saracens and the Armenians are on our side. The brigands of Syria have defeated your army, O Aurelian . . . what will it be when we have received the reinforcements which come to us from all sides? You will lower then that tone with which you, - as if already full conqueror - now bid me to surrender."

The men who came to power using military might failed, with few exceptions, to find effective solutions to the administrative and economic chaos at home. Currency was increasingly worthless; the silver coinage had been diluted to ninety-five percent copper - and more was minted in a vain attempt to check rising inflation. The sophisticated economy collapsed into a system of payment in kind; soldiers and civil servants received rations and clothing instead of currency. Wars and the plague decimated the population, depleting available manpower to the extent that large tracts of cultivated land returned to wilderness. Provincial magistrates who collected taxes were expected to meet their quotas to the state, increasing the already onerous tax burden laid upon the citizens. The Roman Empire had become a top-heavy bureaucracy, demanding more men, more goods, more taxes from provinces already wrung dry.

Into this scene stepped a charismatic and powerful Dalmatian soldier, Diocletian, who claimed divine right to the emperorship. With his substantial army, he set about restoring order to the crumbling empire. First, he fortified the frontiers against the barbarians and separated civil authority from the military to preclude potential military coups. In his

attempt to stabilize the economy, he instituted an edict fixing the prices of wages and goods; though not completely successful, his actions did slow the downhill spiral of the economy.

Recognizing the unwieldiness of Rome's far-flung bureaucracy, Diocletian carved the empire's provinces into smaller units, weakening the power of provincial governors who might contest his authority. The provinces were grouped into dioceses which were then divided into four districts. At the top, Diocletian split the administration between two emperors, each given the title Augustus - one in the East and one in the West. To ensure an orderly succession, each emperor had an heir apparent with the title of Caesar. Each was given responsibility for a defined area of the empire, but any decree issued by the government had to be ratified by all four members of the tetrarchy.

Diocletian established himself as emperor in the East, basing his operations not far from the city that would soon become Constantinople. Here, claiming his divine status as a descendant of Jupiter, king of the gods, he placed a diadem on his head and clothed himself in purple robes. Those who requested an audience with the emperor were required to prostrate themselves in adoration.

The steps Diocletian took to curb the disintegration of the Roman Empire indirectly set the stage for the rise of Byzantium. By preserving the empire, Diocletian increased the importance of the Eastern territories - establishing the infrastructure that would enable them to become the Byzantine Empire. Diocletian failed to exploit or even properly address another force within the empire that helped to create Byzantium - Christianity.

In Diocletian's day, Christianity - despite unfathomable persecution of its members by the Roman community - was rapidly spreading throughout the empire. But it was competing with many other religions, such as the pagan philosophies of Stoicism and Neoplatonism.

Though Stoicism, extolling virtue based on knowledge, appealed to the Roman mind, it had reached its zenith two centuries after the birth of Christ when Emperor Marcus Aurelius adopted it as his guiding philosophy.

Neoplatonism, based on the more spiritual aspects of Plato's doctrines, had its origins in Roman Alexandria. Unlike Stoicism, its proponents sought a mystical encounter with a spiritual being beyond the grasp of rational thought. Neoplatonism appealed to the few capable of mastering its complex metaphysical structure. Neither Stoicism nor Neoplatonism offered anything for the poor in spirit, the legions of negligible slaves and overburdened laborers at the bottom of Greek and Roman society.

The frustrations and hardships endured by the masses were alleviated by a variety of "mystery" religions. The Romans were willing to tolerate these provided they did not promote civil disobedience or disturb the peace; they were comfortable with the cults practicing in North Africa and the East who worshiped exotic gods and performed bizarre rituals. But none of these cults could offer - on a spiritual plane - what Roman law provided through civil organization or what Greek classicism provided in the way of culture.

Christianity was initially regarded by the Romans as just one more mystery religion, a variant of Judaism. Judaism, which had a working agreement with Rome, was permitted to function without interference; so, too, was Christianity.

In this brief, early period of peace, the teachings of Christ began to make their way through the Roman Empire. Unwittingly, the empire fostered its growth; Greek and Latin, the common languages of the Roman world, were also the languages of Christianity. The Roman network of towns and roads, designed to facilitate government and trade, expedited the task of spreading the gospel. Unlike the Jews, who despised Gentiles and separated themselves from the Gentile world, Christians reached out to that world. Initially consisting of small local groups that gathered to commemorate the Last Supper and to celebrate the imminent Second Coming of Christ, the Christians gradually incorporated some of the administrative patterns of the Roman state and created an efficient religious organization of their own.

Almost imperceptibly, the Christian Church developed its own ritual and doctrine, assimilating practices from the religions and philosophies of other peoples of the empire. Its prominent thinkers and intellectuals - Irenaeus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria - assumed the language and many of

the concepts of Greek philosophy. Many of its customs and services stemmed from Judaism, but Christians also adopted rituals and dates from pagan religions - December 25, for example, was selected to celebrate Christ's birth to compete with a pagan festival day. By the third century, Christianity was well on its way to becoming the most powerful single force within the empire, infusing new life into Rome's failing governmental structure and the weakening of classical tradition.

In the early years of their existence, Christians had not been in conflict with the state. When given the choice of submission or suffering, they consistently chose the second. They had no desire to thwart imperial authority, but when compelled by Diocletian to worship him as god and emperor, they refused. With their refusal, Diocletian embarked on what would be the last great persecution of Rome's Christian subjects; by choosing to persecute rather than embrace the Christians, the emperor missed his opportunity to harness their zeal for the benefit of the empire. In 303, he issued the first of a series of edicts, ordering churches razed, sacred books burned, and Christians themselves enslaved, imprisoned, or tortured if they refused to abandon their faith.

Diocletian's efforts made martyrs out of many of his Christian victims, who impressed more than one pagan Roman with the magnitude of their courage. Faced with the consequences of his actions, in 305, Diocletian voluntarily abdicated, leaving his reformed empire divided and fragmented. By 311, four rulers were claiming the title of emperor. One of them, stationed in the West, was Constantine.

Constantine was born in the Roman province of Moesia, later home to the Serbs and the Bulgars. His father Constantius was one of Diocletian's governors in the West and later became a co-emperor; his mother was Helena, a Christian stable-maid or inn-keeper, who reputedly found the true Cross of Christ in Palestine. As a youth, Constantine was educated at Diocletian's court at Nicomedia and later served in the army in Persia and Egypt. When Diocletian retired, Constantine, now a young general in the Roman army, became his father's successor; upon his father's death in 306, he was acclaimed Augustus by his troops.

Six years later, after reportedly seeing a heavenly vision,

Constantine defeated Maxentius, his co-emperor in the West, leading him to endorse - if not practice - Christianity. One year after his victory, he defeated the Eastern Emperor, Maximum, and in 323, defeated and captured the other Eastern Emperor, Licinius. Constantine was now the sole emperor of Rome.

Faced with the task of slowing the disintegration of the empire, and welding its disjointed parts into a durable whole, Constantine made two major decisions. First, he granted Christianity legal status within the empire, allowing Christian priests the same tax exemption as those of other religions, and Christian holy days the same reverence as pagan festivals. Constantine further promoted Christianity by building churches throughout the empire and encouraging bishops and wealthy civilians to do the same. He had his children reared in the Christian faith, and while he did not become a Christian until just before his death, this appears to have been due to a desire to remain officially neutral on the subject of religion.

Constantine's other important decision was to move the empire's capital from Rome to Byzantium, which was more centrally located and possessed an excellent harbor; it was also the junction of major trade routes. Here the empire could more easily confront its most formidable enemies - the Germanic tribes massed along the Danube and the Persians in Anatolia. Here, too, lay some of the most important centers of the Christian religion.

In his quest for a suitable capital, Constantine considered many other cities, among these, Jerusalem, the city of Christ's death and resurrection, in which Constantine authorized the building of several churches. He investigated Naissus, his birthplace in what is now Serbia; Nicomedia, a citadel on the Anatolian frontier in which Diocletian had constructed several state buildings; Sardica (Sofia), a bustling center of trade in what is now Bulgaria; and Thessaloniki (Salonika), a city vital to the commerce of the empire in the eastern Mediterranean, and significantly, visited by St. Paul.

He also contemplated Troy, scene of the epic battle between the Greeks and Trojans immortalized by Homer. According to legend, he personally laid out the lines of the city walls and

ordered workmen to begin construction at once. The work was well under way, and the gates in the main wall had already been hung when God appeared to the emperor in a dream and commanded that he seek out another site for the new Rome.

Whatever his reason, in a momentous decision, the emperor ultimately passed over Troy and chose Byzantium, a small trading town on a strategic site jutting into the Sea of Marmara.



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THE CITY OF CONSTANTINE

Nearly a thousand years before Constantine decided to establish his new Christian capital in the East, a Greek named Byzas sailed from his home at Megara across the Aegean, passed the site of Troy, then into the Dardanelles and across the Sea of Marmara. There he came to the entrance of the Bosphorus, the narrow channel that winds for seventeen miles between a double range of shrub-covered, rocky hills to emerge into the Black Sea.

Before he set sail, Byzas asked the Delphic Oracle - a prophetess at the Temple of Apollo - where he should establish his new colonial city. In her usual ambiguous manner, the priestess told him: "Opposite the blind." Only when he reached the Bosphorus did Byzas realize what she had meant: Opposite the triangular peninsula that terminated the European land mass, Greek colonists had founded the city of Chalcedon; they must have been blind not to have recognized the superiority of the site a half a mile away on the opposite shore. Here Byzas founded his city, which would be called Byzantium until it was renamed by Constantine the Great. The emperor initially called his new capital New Rome, but later it became known as Constantinople, City of Constantine. Byzantium, however, would live on in perpetuity as the name of the imperial civilization Constantine established.

The City of Constantine, dominating as it did the north-south sea route from Russia to the Mediterranean, possessed numerous commercial advantages. To the north, ships would carry corn and furs, caviar and salt, honey and gold, wax and slaves. From the south, from the gardens of Anatolia and granaries of Egypt, the city's growing population would be fed.

At Constantinople, the merchants traveling overland from Asia to Eastern Europe had only a narrow section of sea to cross, making the city an ideal passageway for traders from India, Ceylon, and China carrying ivory and amber, porcelain and precious stones, silks and damask; aloes and balsam, cinnamon and sugar, musk and ginger, and other spices. In fertile districts west of the city, grapes and grains flourished, and the surrounding waters of the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara teemed with fish.

The natural defenses of the city were impressive. To the

south, the Bosphorus flowed from the Sea of Marmara into a narrow inlet to form a perfect landlocked harbor known as the Golden Horn. As the sixth-century Byzantine writer Procopius observed, the Horn "is always calm, being made by nature never to be stormy, as though limits were set to the billows and the surge was shut out in the city's honor. And in winter when harsh winds fall upon the sea and the strait [the Bosphorus], as soon as ships reach the bay's entrance, they can proceed without pilot and moor easily. The whole bay is about five miles long and all of it is a harbor, so that when a ship anchors there the stern rides on the sea while the prow rests on land, as if the two elements rivaled each other in their desire to be of greatest service to the city."

When Constantine decided to move the capital from Rome, he also decided to make his new capital even more magnificent than the old one. Like Rome, Constantinople was a "city of the seven hills," which Constantine divided into fourteen districts. From Rome, Constantine brought the sacred talisman of the decaying empire, a wooden statue of the goddess Athena believed to have dropped from the sky and carried by Aeneas from Troy to Italy. Constantine also brought members of noble families to form a new senatorial class, which he housed in fine style.

The royal structures were of Roman design. All the statues and ancient art Constantine could remove were transferred to his city. These included such masterpieces as the Calydonian boar - a frieze depicting the capture of a Grecian mythological monster - and a serpentine column from Delphi bearing the names of the Greek cities that had defeated the Persians at Plateia in 479 BCE.

In one vital respect, Constantinople was not an imitation of old Rome; it was constructed purposely as a Christian city. There, Constantine built the Hagia Sophia (the Church of Holy Wisdom) and many other churches, including the Church of the Holy Apostles, where he placed among the twelve symbolic tombs of the apostles a thirteenth - his own. Many later emperors were also buried here, as all the Byzantine emperors were regarded as "the equal of the apostles."

Throughout his new city, Constantine displayed Christian crosses and relics of the saints. Other objects, such as the adze with which Noah was supposed to have built the ark,

and a flask of scented oil with which Mary Magdalen was said to have anointed the feet of Christ, Constantine enclosed at the foot of a huge column made up of six drums of porphyry - crystalized igneous rock - carved with laurel leaves. This giant column rested in the center of a magnificent elliptical forum, paved with marble and surrounded with colonnades. This was the Forum of Constantine.

Over the years, monuments and objects connected with the Christian faith multiplied throughout the city. Many were associated with the Virgin Mary, who was considered the city's special protectress. "You would not find any public place or imperial dwelling, no reputable inn or private house of those in authority where there was not a church or an oratory of the Mother of God," a student of the period wrote. In a church at the northwest boundary of the innermost walls, one of the most precious of all the city's relics, the Virgin's robe, which had been brought to Constantinople from Palestine at the time of Leo I (457-474), was displayed. Also housed in the church was a likeness of the Virgin, covered by a veil which was said to mysteriously part to disclose the image beneath.

In another church dedicated to Mary lay her belt, a relic thought to have induced a multitude of miracles. During an attack by the Russians in 860, the Virgin's robe was carried around the walls and battlements, leading the Russians to abandon the siege.

"Truly," the Ecumenical Patriarch (also known as an Archbishop) Photius, wrote, "is this most holy garment the robe of God's Mother! It embraced the walls, and the foes inexplicably showed their backs; the city put it around itself, and the camp of the enemy was broken up as at a signal; the city bedecked itself with it, and the enemy were deprived of the hopes that bore them on. For immediately as the Virgin's robe went round the walls, the barbarians gave up the siege and broke camp, while we were delivered from impending capture and were granted unexpected salvation."

Relics were brought to the capital from all parts of the Christian world, where they were displayed in churches, sanctuaries and shrines, encased in gold and silver, ornamented with precious stones, often wrapped in a cloth of silk. The city became the repository of all manner of holy

objects: the linen worn by the infant Jesus, the blood-covered mantle worn by Christ on the cross, the lance that pierced his side, the crown of thorns, and the stone of the tomb lay side by side with the venerated relics of St. Luke and St. Andrew, St. Timothy, and the head of John the Baptist.

On May 11, 330, the day of the city's inauguration, a statue of Apollo, with its head replaced by a head of Constantine, was hoisted to the top of the column in the Forum. The statue of Constantine-Apollo, holding in one hand a scepter, and in the other, a globe representing the world, survived until the beginning of the twelfth century, when it was toppled by a storm and replaced by a golden cross.

Constantine's building endeavors were prodigious. Using marble brought from islands in the Sea of Marmara, and wood from the forests bordering the Black Sea, he enlarged the Hippodrome, the ancient Greek stadium built by Septimius Severus a century before. At one time, the city's edifices included two theaters, eight public and 153 private baths, fifty-two porticoes, five granaries, eight aqueducts, fourteen churches, fourteen palaces, and 4,388 houses.

As the populace grew, the city annexed the slice of land stretching between the Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmara. In the fifth century, to defend this expansion, the emperor constructed a triple line of walls, three miles in length. With walls built along the Sea of Marmara and the Golden Horn, the city became virtually an enclosed fortress.

The greatest changes in the landscape of Constantinople took place in the sixth century when the Emperor Justinian erected some of the greatest structures of the Byzantine world. The massive construction project was necessitated by the riots of 532 when a fire that burned for five days razed half the city to the ground. Many of the public buildings erected by Constantine and his successors - including the Hagia Sophia - were destroyed.

Once Justinian had cleared away the rubble, he summoned the greatest architects he could find - Isidore of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles - to repair the damage. He completely rebuilt the Hagia Sophia and began to replace the city's public buildings. Later emperors supplemented his efforts, enlarging the imperial palace, erecting new churches, enhancing the

forums, and laying out public gardens. The edifices erected by Justinian remained standing until 1453 when the city was captured by the Turks.

The comments of later travelers attest to the city's magnificence. "O what a splendid city," Fulk of Chartres exclaimed in the eleventh century, "how stately, how fair, how many monasteries therein, how many palaces raised by sheer labor in its broadways and streets, how many works of art, marvelous to behold; it would be wearisome to tell of the abundance of all good things; of gold and of silver, garments of manifold fashion, and such sacred relics. Ships are at all times putting in at this port, so that there is nothing that men want that is not brought hither."

Inside the great walls of the city, there were few broad thoroughfares; the majority of the streets could not even accommodate a cart of any size. Consequently, goods were often carried by camels, mules, or on the backs of men; it was cheaper and simpler to hire a man than employ an animal. The narrow streets were filled with the siren song of peddlers, the cries of merchants who went house to house selling bread, vegetables, and fresh fish.

Constantinople had no distinctly upper-class neighborhoods. The houses of the rich were flanked by the modest homes of the middle class and the hovels of the poor. The wealthy were afforded a certain amount of privacy, however, because the exterior walls of their houses faced the street while the rooms opened out on an interior courtyard, invariably containing a fountain and elaborate landscaping. Maintained by a staff of slaves and servants, these mansions featured roomfuls of gold-plated and ivory-inlaid furniture, gilded ceilings and pillared halls. The middle class resided in two-story wooden buildings with balconies from which matrons and sequestered young girls could view the activity in the streets. The poor crowded in basement rooms or in tenements spread throughout the city. As French historian Odon de Deuil observed, "The rich cover the public ways with their constructions and leave the sewers and dark places to the poor and strangers. There are committed murders, robberies, and all the crimes which haunt obscurity. . . ."

Even the poor, however, enjoyed fresh water - vitally important in a Mediterranean climate. Channeled into the city

through aqueducts from the surrounding hills, water was stored in cisterns, then piped to fountains at street corners and in public squares, available to everyone free of charge. Sewage and waste water were carried down to the sea through an intricate system of underground drains. The city provided many public baths, open to both men and women, and medical care to those who could not afford to pay. Despite these precautions, disease spread quickly and took a terrible toll.

The main street of the city, which ran from the western walls almost to the gates of the Imperial Palace, was called the Mesê, or Middle Street. Bordered by columned porticoes and interspersed with immense squares containing statues of emperors and empresses, it was the road used for all imperial processions. Lining the Mesê were the finer shops of the city, piled high with silks and brocades, copper and goldwork, leather and glass, jewels and reliquaries. Near the end of the street, just before the Imperial Palace, were the perfumers' stalls, positioned so that "the sweet perfumes may waft upward . . . and at the same time permeate the vestibule of the Imperial Palace."

Walking along this street, visitors could encounter a broad spectrum of the city's multinational population, estimated in Justinian's reign to be 600,000. There were natives of Cappadocia and Phrygia, the semi-nomadic Bulgars and turbaned Persians, Jews from Palestine and Syrians from Damascus, Illyrians, Armenians, and Goths. By the ninth century, few of the residents could claim pure Greek or Roman lineage; most were a mixture of the varied peoples of the empire. The only criteria for citizenship were that one speak Greek and participate in the rituals of the Orthodox Church.

Into this cosmopolitan city came thousands of sailors, merchants, diplomats, and travelers from Britain, Spain, Gaul, Scandinavia, Russia, Persia, Arabia, and Africa. Mingling in the streets with the more plainly dressed Byzantines, these visitors, with their brightly colored cloaks, furs, strange headdresses and unfamiliar tongues, attracted considerable attention. Joining them in the streets were their slaves, often prisoners taken in war, who performed the menial tasks in Byzantium.

Occasionally, a court dignitary clad in brocaded silk would go by on horseback, or a noble lady would pass in a brightly decorated carriage pulled by mules. She would likely be on her way to the Baths of Zeuxippus, where society women showed off their extravagant clothes and jewelry and exchanged the latest gossip. On national holidays and religious celebrations, the entire city would turn out to watch the resplendent procession of the emperor and his court, accompanied by the patriarch and his attendants. Many of the spectators could be identified by the type of clothing they wore: Philosophers wore gray, physicians wore blue, and ascetics, bright scarlet, with their hair covered by a net.

The activities of the city dwellers centered around three great structures: the Hippodrome, the Sacred Imperial Palace, and the Church of Hagia Sophia. These represented the indivisible units of the Byzantine world: the people, the imperial authority, and the religion. Appropriately, the buildings were situated perpendicular to each other, forming three sides of the main public square, the Augustaeum, an open rectangular court paved with slabs of dark marble and encircled by a colonnade. Here an incoming emperor was lifted above the crowd on a shield and acclaimed by the populace on his way to his coronation in Hagia Sophia. Here, atop a huge column, stood a huge bronze statue of Emperor Justinian astride a horse, clad in armor, wearing a plumed helmet, and carrying a globe in his left hand, signifying that all the earth was subject to him.

The Hippodrome, 1,300 feet long and 490 feet wide, could seat as many as 60,000 spectators. In the center ran the *spina*, the backbone of the structure, a low stone barrier with three cones at each end marking the turning points of the course. At the top of the *spina* rested works of ancient art, one of which was a stone obelisk from the Temple of Karnak in Egypt. Installed at the Hippodrome in CE 390, it still stands on a base with a bas-relief showing the emperor and his family in the royal box at the games.

Another monument still standing is the obelisk of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. Once covered with bronze plates decorated with bas-reliefs, it is now only a tall, thin shaft of bare masonry. A portion of the bronze serpentine column brought from Delphi by Constantine the Great also remains - whittled down through time and circumstance from twenty-six

feet to eighteen.

At the northeast end of the Hippodrome, which ran along one side of the Augustaeum, stood the imperial box, the *kathisma*. From here, the emperor and the dignitaries of the court (though not the empress, who had a seat of her own in one of the palace churches) watched races and public games, celebrated Byzantine military victories, and presided at executions of convicted criminals.

Flanking the Hippodrome to the east lay the Sacred Imperial Palace, the residence of the emperor. The entryway of the palace was a vestibule known as the Brazen Entrance - the Chalkê - because its roof and doors were made from gilded bronze. Its ceilings, refurbished by Justinian and further renovated in the ninth century, were covered with mosaics, some depicting Justinian's great general, Belisarius, returning victoriously to Constantinople. The walls and floors were made of fine marble tiles of emerald, red, and white, broken with undulating lines of blue.

Behind the Chalkê lay the palace itself, not one building but many, interspersed with gardens, terraces, pavilions, churches, fountains, a stadium, an indoor riding school, a polo ground, swimming pools, and lily ponds. There were also storerooms, kitchens, stables, servants' quarters, guardrooms, and dungeons.

One of the most impressive of the buildings was the Chrysotriklinos, one of the emperor's throne rooms. Above the throne was an image of Christ seated on his throne, veiled by a curtain of silk woven with gold and ornamented with precious stones. Other items in the Chrysotriklinos were a gold and silver banquet table, couches, engraved plates, crowns, chandeliers, crosses, and imperial vestments.

Outside the Chalkê was a palace known as the Magnaura, which contained the famous "throne of Solomon." This royal seat was flanked by golden lions and gilded bronze trees with jewels and enameled birds set in their branches.

The New Palace, built in the ninth century, featured a colonnade with alternating columns made from *verd antique* - a dark green stone with white veins - and red onyx. On the floor of the imperial bedchamber, strips of marble radiated

outward from a central medallion that framed a peacock in mosaic. On the walls, four mosaic eagles stretched their wings amid plaques of multicolored glass that shimmered like a field of flowers. Above the wainscoting were mosaics of gold portraying members of the imperial family, their hands raised toward a brilliant green cross on the ceiling.

Between these buildings and the sea wall lay the imperial gardens, filled with shaded walks and fountains; one dispensed wine through a golden pineapple into a silver basin full of almonds and pistachios. On the grounds, ibis, peacocks, and pheasants wandered among shrubs and flowers. Also within the walled gardens stood the *porphyry* - or purple - chamber reserved for the birth of imperial children, giving rise to the title, "born in the purple" (*Porphyrogenitus*), which was conferred on children of the ruling family. Near these was the stairway leading down to the emperor's private harbor, the Boucoleon, where the royal barges and yachts were tethered to marble quays decorated with sculpture.

But none of these splendors exceeded the glories of the Hagia Sophia. Today, the great church reconstructed by Justinian is now a museum, one of the supreme artistic expressions of the Christian world. "Glory be to God, who has thought me worthy to finish this work. Solomon, I have outdone thee!" Justinian is reported to have exclaimed when he first viewed the completed edifice. At its dedication in 537, Justinian threw a banquet at which 6,000 sheep, 1,000 each of oxen, pigs and poultry, and 500 deer were served to the citizens of Constantinople.

Justinian spared no expense in making this church a magnificent interplay of stone, marble, light, color, and space. Perhaps its most striking feature is the fluidity of the architecture, an effect achieved through the selection of the marble slabs that constitute the floor and walls. Each slab, unique in its tone and shade and veining, was cut precisely to make it merge seamlessly with its neighbor. Because of this careful sculpting, the stones appear as fields of alternating color, smoky blue or darkish green or warm red. Rows of pillars made from *porphyry* and *verd antique* form the nave and carry the small arches that support the galleries. Larger arches are crowned by half-domes which are surmounted by the great dome itself - the most spectacular of the Byzantine

world. Viewed from below, it gives the impression of weightlessness, seeming, as Procopius put it, "not to rest upon solid masonry but to cover the space beneath as though suspended from heaven." This effect is further heightened by a halo of windows above the interior cornice, which makes the bases of the interior ribs supporting Hagia Sophia's dome seem less substantial; as they reach upward to the crown of the dome, the ribs become more delicate.

Adding to the overall effect, light from the corona of windows in the dome and the lunettes in the half-domes bathes the central nave in radiance. At night, to continue the effect, Byzantines lit lamps and candles by the thousands, hung by long, twisted brass chains from the dome and the ceilings, turning the church into a brilliant beacon. The Greek poet, Paul the Silentiary, describes the splendor of the church at night in a poem he wrote for its dedication: "Thus through the spaces of the great church come rays of light, expelling clouds of care, and filling the mind with joy. The sacred light cheers all; even the sailor guiding his bark on the waves, leaving behind him the unfriendly billows of the raging Pontus, and winding a sinuous course amidst creeks and rocks, with heart fearful at the dangers of his nightly wanderings - perhaps he has left the Aegean and guides his ship against adverse currents in the Hellespont, awaiting with taut forestay the onslaught of a storm from Africa - does not guide his laden vessel by the light of Cynosure, or the circling Bear, but by the divine light of the church itself. Yet not only does it guide the merchant at night, like the rays of Pharos on the coast of Africa, but it also shows the way to the living God."

Hagia Sophia was the crowning glory of the Byzantine world. Its capital, Constantinople - the "queen of cities" - a metropolis of commerce and wellspring of culture, attracted to its gates Jews and Muslims, Russians and Italians, Spaniards and Egyptians. Its architecture influenced the ecclesiastical architecture of other historic cities - Ravenna, Venice, Kiev, Moscow. Above all, Constantinople, in its splendor and corruption, sophistication and imagery, order and anarchy, great victories and petty vanities was the center from which Byzantine history unfolded - and deeply affected the history of the civilized world.



3

BECOMING WHOLLY BYZANTIUM

During the 1,123 years of its existence - from CE 330 to 1453 - Byzantium's boundaries were in a continual state of flux. In the age of Justinian, in the sixth century, they extended from Spain in the west to Mesopotamia in the east, and from the Black Sea and the Danube to the coast of Mediterranean Africa. During the last decades of the Palaiologos dynasty, Byzantium's final period, the empire's borders had shrunk until they encompassed only the city itself and parts of southern Greece.

It's impossible to determine the actual birth date of Byzantium - Constantine's selection of the city as his capital did not coincide with the inauguration of the Byzantine Empire. The seeds of transformation from a Roman empire to a Byzantine Empire had, indeed, been planted - by Constantine's conversion to Christianity and his founding of a new capital - but the first phase of Byzantine history - from 330 to the death of Anastasius I in 518 - was little more than an attempt to strengthen and defend the old Roman Empire.

Christianity, meanwhile, was flourishing as the state stamped out paganism with increasing vigor. For a brief period, however, from 361 to 363, Emperor Julian, known as Julian the Apostate, attempted to restore the gods of antiquity; though raised a Christian, Julian became a fervent adherent of the ancient Hellenistic rites. As emperor, he strengthened paganism by reorganizing its priesthood and taking part in its ritualistic services, kindling the altar fire, wielding the knife, and inspecting the entrails of slaughtered birds to divine the future. At the same time, he attempted to weaken Christianity by removing Christians from military and civil posts and forbidding them to teach the works of Homer, Hesiod, and other renowned pagan writers. When he closed churches, however, the Christians revolted, threatening the state with anarchy. Upon his death, his successors reversed his policies; in 379, Theodosius the Great (379-395) proclaimed Christianity the state religion.

Between the fourth and early sixth centuries, the eastern half of the empire somehow managed to escape the barbarian invasions that wreaked havoc on Italy and other Roman possessions in the West. While it is true that in the second half of the fourth century, the Huns drove the Germanic tribes of Eastern Europe across the borders into Byzantium, after the Goths defeated Byzantine forces at Adrianople in 378,

they were pacified by Theodosius, who offered them full autonomy, grants of land, and service in the imperial forces. In the West, however, the barbarian onslaught brought about the downfall of the empire. By the early part of the sixth century, Italy was in the hands of the Ostrogoths, Gaul had been seized by the Franks, the Visigoths held Spain, and the Vandals had conquered North Africa, leaving the West in turmoil and darkness.

Spared the devastating consequences of the barbarian migrations, Byzantium had been able to preserve its rich Greco-Roman heritage. During the same time frame, the basic doctrines of Orthodox Christianity were being hammered out and proclaimed at the great councils of the Church, particularly at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The stage was now set for the emergence of the civilization implicit in Constantine's acceptance of Christ as "Ruler and Master of the Universe."

This emergence was in part accomplished during the years 527 to 565, when the last of the great Roman emperors, Justinian I, began to definitively distinguish the Roman world from the Byzantine.

Portraits of Justinian reveal a man of average height and build, with dark hair and a ruddy complexion; his clean-shaven face wore a habitual faint smile. But this unassuming man possessed intelligence and talents that few other rulers possessed, and he played the part of emperor with affability, arrogance, and vigor.

Justinian was about forty-five years old when he donned the purple robes of royalty. His unschooled uncle Justin, who had arrived in the capital with nothing but a bag of bread on his back, had fought his way to the throne through the ranks of the army. Justin educated Justinian, who earned the throne in his own right by performing brilliantly as his uncle's chief aide. As emperor, he was highly disciplined: He ate little and frequently fasted; he rose early and worked late. After a full day of dealing with affairs of state, he studied late into the night to expand his already extensive knowledge of law, theology, music, and architecture. In spite of his grueling schedule, Justinian was - as his biographer Procopius admitted - "the most accessible person in the world. For even men of low estate and altogether obscure had complete

freedom not only to come before him but to converse with him."

Justinian's wife, Theodora, was equally remarkable. As the daughter of a bear-keeper at the Hippodrome and an actress, her reputation was so sullied that people avoided her in the streets. But she was also intelligent, compassionate, and courageous; these were the traits that led Justinian to fall in love with her. At first, she was only his mistress - a man of his rank was forbidden to marry an actress - but as senator, he succeeded in getting the law changed, allowing him to take Theodora as his wife.

It was Theodora who prevented Justinian from abandoning Constantinople during the Nika riots in 532. "I hold that now if ever flight is inexpedient, even if it brings safety," she said. "When a man has once been born into the light, it is inevitable that he should also meet death. But for an emperor to become a fugitive is a thing not to be endured. . . . If you wish to flee to safety, Emperor, it can easily be done . . . there is the sea; here are the ships. But as for me, I hold with the old saying that royalty makes a fine winding-sheet."

Theodora also had a less attractive side. Rumors swirled of secret dungeons in her palace where people she disapproved of disappeared forever. A more favorable story is one in which she sheltered a deposed patriarch in her apartments for twelve years without anyone knowing of it. Ruthless and capable of doing anything to get her way, she nevertheless had hospitals built for the poor and converted an old palace on the bank of the Bosphorus into a home for destitute women.

Justinian was obsessed with the idea of restoring the Roman Empire to its former glory. "We have good hope," he wrote in an official edict, "that God will allow us to reconquer the lands of the old Roman Empire which have been lost through indolence." He would have been wiser to concentrate on fortifying his eastern borders, where the restored Persian Empire was growing restless. Instead, he agreed to pay the Persian king a large annual tribute and threw all his forces, first under the brilliant general Belisarius and then Narses, into an effort to recapture the western and African provinces lost to the Germanic tribes.

In 533, Belisarius broke the stronghold the Vandals had established in North Africa. Two years later, the Byzantines occupied Sicily, and in 536, Belisarius entered Rome. By the time of Justinian's death, Roman forces had conquered the Ostrogoths in Italy, and had taken control of other islands in the western Mediterranean - Corsica, Sardinia, and the Balearics - before foraying into southeast Spain. Nevertheless, Spain remained in Visigothic hands, and Gaul was never recaptured. Despite this, before he died, Justinian may have believed that his dream of restoring the ancient unity of the empire would soon be realized. Indeed, at the time of his death, the Byzantine Empire included almost the entire Mediterranean world.

Justinian set out to restore the Roman Empire internally as well as geographically. He abolished the sale of offices, centralized the bureaucracy, and expanded his building program to include fortifications in Europe and in Asia. But his greatest and most lasting monument to Byzantine society - and Western society as well- was his recodification of Roman law. At his instigation, a legal commission, under the direction of Roman jurist Tribonian, set out to summarize the various components of the Roman legal system. The result of their efforts, the *Corpus* of Justinian, formed the basis of the Byzantine legal system. When it was introduced in the West in the eleventh century, it further shaped the development of Latin legal and political thought.

Justinian's attitude toward the Church was much the same as the other pagan emperors of Rome. Just as the pagans had dominated the affairs of the government, they also sought to dominate the Church. Justinian's interest in the Church, his support of missionary work, his promotion of monasticism, and his concern for theology were all genuine. But for him, the state was the sacred instrument that would forge a Christian Roman Empire.

To Justinian, religious unity and state unity were one and the same. Although Christianity had been declared the state religion, the traditions of paganism lingered. In his attempt to eradicate them, Justinian closed the university at Athens, paganism's last stronghold. At the same time, his desire to rehabilitate the empire in the West led him to seek the support of the pope.

Pursuing an alliance with the pope meant exacerbating an already serious religious controversy centering on the doctrine of Monophysitism, which exalted Christ's divinity above that of His humanity - a doctrine condemned by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. In the outlying Byzantine provinces of Egypt and Syria, where Monophysitism was strong, Justinian tried first to placate the heretics. But pressure from the pope soon forced him to play both sides, alternately mollifying the pope, then the Monophysites. Still, these concessions failed to pacify the Monophysites, and their antagonism toward Constantinople mounted. A century or so later, the Egyptians and the Syrians would view the Persian conquerors and the forces of Islam as liberators from the religious and political oppression of Byzantium.

In the end, Justinian's dream of restoring the Roman Empire remained out of reach. After his death in 565, the achievements of this last Roman Emperor began to fall apart. In 568, the Lombards invaded Italy. By the early seventh century, Spain was again in Visigothic hands; the Avars had invaded from the north, and the Persians had conquered parts of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. The empire was on the verge of anarchy and bankruptcy.

Though Justinian's religious policy was likely dictated by reasons of state, it nevertheless confirmed the triumph of Christianity over the pagan cults of Rome. In the Hagia Sophia, as in other contemporary churches in Constantinople, Jerusalem, Ravenna, and elsewhere, the spirituality fostered by Justinian during his reign transcended even the glory of his territorial conquests.

The disintegration of the empire in the years after Justinian's death was temporarily halted by Emperor Heraclius (610-641). Rallying his people and draining the churches and provinces for funds, he took the offensive against the invaders. He bought off the Avars and defeated the Persians, returning Egypt, Syria, and Palestine to Byzantine rule. The True Cross, which the Persians had removed from Jerusalem, was triumphantly restored to the Holy Land. Heraclius also began dividing the empire into a series of military provinces, or themes, a system that would remain in place for the next five centuries.

Heraclius's efforts provided only a temporary respite;

mounted tribesmen from central Arabia - followers of the Prophet Mohammed - were searching for lands to conquer. Within ten years after the prophet's death in 632, these warriors occupied Egypt, Palestine, Persia, and Syria. When Heraclius died in 641, the empire had lost its southeasterly possessions forever. By the end of the Heraclian dynasty in 711, Byzantium held only the Anatolian peninsula and the Balkan coast, southern Italy and the island of Sicily. Then, at the end of the seventh century, the Bulgars appeared in the Balkans.

In a series of attacks between 673 and 677, the Muslims besieged Constantinople but were repulsed by the Byzantine fleet. In 717, when the Muslims attacked a second time, a powerful general named Konon came to Byzantium's rescue. Once in control, he forced the abdication of Emperor Theodosius III and crowned himself Leo III. As founder of the new Syrian dynasty, he and his son Constantine V pushed the Muslims back to the southern fringe of Anatolia and continued Heraclius's reorganization of the provinces, shoring up the diminished state's defenses.

By now, the Roman Empire - both spiritually and territorial - had become wholly Byzantium. Having lost most of its conquests in the West and the Middle East, Byzantium, no longer influenced by the Latin elements in the eastern part of the empire, became predominantly Greek. But even in lands no longer ruled by Byzantium, its culture endured, pervading territories that had never been under Byzantine rule.

The breach between Byzantium and the West was further widened by a long and bitter family struggle that ultimately destroyed the Syrian dynasty. This lurid saga began in 780 when ten-year-old Constantine VI inherited the throne. Acting as his regent, Constantine's widowed mother, Empress Irene, ruled both her pliable son and his empire with an iron fist. But when Constantine turned sixteen, he engineered a plan to free him from his mother's clutches: marriage to Rotrude, a daughter of the powerful Frankish king Charlemagne, whose realm bordered Byzantium.

Irene, a cruel and nakedly ambitious woman, quickly put a stop to her son's scheme. The disappointed Constantine, with the help of a sympathetic army, rose up and banished his mother from the palace. But Irene was unstoppable. After

seven years of intrigue and conspiracy, in 797, she succeeded in having Constantine imprisoned and blinded, taking his throne for herself.

In Rome, Pope Leo III viewed Constantine's removal as an opportunity to elevate his own prestige. Declaring the throne to be vacant, in 800, the pope conferred the title and crown of emperor on Charlemagne. To the Byzantines, his actions were seen as a criminal appropriation of power, further aggravating relations between the Eastern Church and the papacy.

Irene's days of glory were soon ended. In 802, the patricians of Byzantium ousted the empress and exiled her to the island of Lesbos, where she was kept under close guard. Forced to support herself by spinning wool, she died the following year.

The pinnacle of Byzantine achievement came under the Macedonian dynasty (867-1056). Under the emperors Basil I (867-886), Leo VI (886-912), Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-959), and Basil II Bulgaroctonus (976-1025), Byzantium flourished.

During this period of external expansion and internal prosperity, the riches of the world poured into Constantinople - through the trade routes of the Levant, overland from India and beyond, and down the great Russian rivers. The great cities of Antioch and Aleppo were reconquered, pushing Islamic forces back into Syria. With the seizure of Crete in 961 and Cyprus in 965, Byzantium reestablished its preeminence as a naval power in the eastern Mediterranean. The Slavic world was drawn into the Byzantine culture through trade and religious penetration. In 957, the Grand Princess Olga, regent of the newly founded Russian state, came to Constantinople and was baptized. Her grandson, Prince Vladimir of Kiev, after assisting Basil II in crushing a rebellion, wed Basil's sister, Anna, and converted himself and his people to Christianity.

Basil II ruled Byzantium for forty-nine years. Plain-spoken and direct, he was considered by the aristocracy to be coarse and unpolished. As the eleventh-century historian and philosopher Michael Psellus noted, he lived simply, eschewing the trappings of royalty. "He even went so far as to scorn bodily ornaments," Psellus wrote. "His neck was unadorned

by collars, his head by diadems. He refused to make himself conspicuous in purple-colored cloaks and he put away superfluous rings, even clothes of different colors. On the other hand, he took great pains to ensure that the various departments of the government should be centered on himself, and that they should work, without friction."

In the East, Basil's primary adversaries were the Fatimids, an Egyptian dynastic family. In 994, the Fatimids defeated the Byzantine armies on the Orontes, then besieged Aleppo, threatening Antioch itself. A brave and capable leader, Basil personally led the campaign to recover the situation. Unlike many other emperors, he stayed in the field with his men, steeling himself against the cold and the summer heat. A brave and capable leader, well versed in military tactics, he made a formidable opponent. By 999, he had restored the status quo in Syria; after that, the Eastern Arabs no longer posed a threat.

With nothing to fear from his enemies in the East, Basil was free to concentrate on his enemies in the West, specifically the Bulgarians, who, under King Samuel, had conquered all of Macedonia except Thessaloniki, Thessaly, Epirus, and part of Albania. In 1001, Basil launched his counter-offensive against the Bulgars, ultimately reducing Samuel's territory to half its original size. Samuel's final defeat came in 1014 at a battle in the Struma region of northern Greece. Samuel escaped, but Basil is said to have captured 14,000 prisoners, whom he blinded and sent back to Samuel in batches of a hundred, each led by a one-eyed man. When Samuel saw his defeated soldiers, his heart gave out and he died two days later.

Under Basil, the Byzantine Empire was again transformed into a great power, encompassing territories extending from the Black Sea to the Adriatic in the west, from the Danube in the north to the Euphrates in the south. He celebrated his triumph by marching through Greece to Athens, where he held a service of thanksgiving in the Parthenon, which had been converted into a Christian church dedicated to the Mother of God.

In spite of this resurgence of Byzantine power, there were signs of trouble in the West, where the Normans were penetrating Byzantine possessions in southern Italy. The rift between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople deepened

so far that in 1054, the two Churches excommunicated each other. The Crusade fever rising in the West, directed against Infidels in the East, would eventually include Byzantium itself. In the north, the Patzinaks and Uzes were pouring across the Danube frontier. At home, the structure of Byzantine society was being weakened by the greed of a privileged aristocracy at the expense of small peasant proprietors and soldiers who had been granted farms in exchange for military service. Finally, over the eastern borders lay the deepening shadow of the Seljuk Turks.

Although under the Macedonians, Byzantium had risen to new heights, by the time the last member of the house came to the throne, the tide of Byzantine history had turned - for the last time.



4

THE BYZANTINE EMPERORS

Constantine's advocacy of Christianity brought about a change in the status of the emperors who ruled Byzantium. Although the imperial throne retained its magnificence, the rulers of the new Christian empire were no longer seen as divine, but merely the representatives of Christ.

Yet in another sense, the Byzantine emperors were closely identified with their God: They were a visible manifestation of the invisible God, tasked with bringing order and harmony to humankind under the absolute rule of the monarchy. As God was the regulator of the cosmic order, the emperor, his human extension, must be the regulator of the social order.

The actions of the emperor now took on a sacred and symbolic meaning. His daily rituals were intended to reflect, as nearly as possible, the rituals performed in heaven by God. The emperor's status as an individual now became secondary to the fulfillment of the duties of this higher office. Everything was tied to this divine mission: his crown, his throne, his palace, his court, his vestments, his public appearances, his statues, his images, the mystical procession of his days, his imperial service, his pronouncements and his laws.

Although elaborate ceremonies were used to inaugurate the emperor in office, this was no longer an assurance that his offspring would succeed him - or even that he would hold power for long. Legitimate dynastic descent did give a male strong claims, especially after the eleventh century, but there was no guarantee of succession. Indeed, the notion that an emperor was chosen by divine decree meant that there could be no fixed constitutional rule dictating this matter. The only method of discerning the divine will was to see who actually occupied the throne. In other words, all means of becoming an emperor were now legitimate - if they were successful. An unsuccessful attempt to claim the throne, on the other hand, was unforgivable and disastrous for the would-be ruler.

Furthermore, what God had given he could also take away. An emperor's throne might be seized in as unpredictable and sudden a manner as it had been given to him - and the consequences for him were usually as dire as if he had tried to seize power and failed.

This revised view of the throne explains the atmosphere of intrigue and conspiracy that darkens the history of Byzantine

royalty. Of the eighty-eight emperors who reigned from 324 to 1453 - from Constantine I to Constantine XI - twenty-nine died violent deaths, and another thirteen took refuge, temporarily or for the rest of their lives, in monasteries.

One emperor who died violently was Nicephorus II Phocas, a former general who had conquered Aleppo, Antioch, and Crete and was the scourge of the Saracens. He was acclaimed emperor by his troops in 963 after the mysterious death of the incumbent, Romanus II, and quickly married Romanus's young widow, the beautiful Theophano. But Nicephorus was old and unattractive, and before long, Theophano took one of Nicephorus's former comrades in arms, John Tzimiskes, as her lover, and plotted the death of the emperor. She had her servants admit Tzimiskes into the seashore palace while the emperor was sleeping; he stabbed Nicephorus to death, decapitated him, and threw his body in the snow, seating himself on the Byzantine throne.

The most hideous of imperial deaths was that of Andronikos I Komnenos in 1185. He was chained for days and beaten black and blue; his teeth were broken with hammers and one of his hands cut off. He was then tied to the back of a sick camel and paraded through the streets of Constantinople. Finally, after boiling water had been thrown in his face and his eye plucked out, he was strung up for additional torture in the Hippodrome. Over and over, he repeated, "Lord have mercy upon me. Why do you strike a broken reed?" He was at last put out of his misery by a sword plunged into his entrails.

Until he met his death - natural or otherwise - an emperor had to follow a ritual that had developed in Byzantium over the centuries. This began early in the morning when the gate leading to the Augustaeum was opened and the captain of the watch would wake the emperor with three knocks on the door of his private apartment.

On official occasions, the emperor would wear a long, white, tight-sleeved silken tunic. On top of this, he wore a purple cape or *chlamys*, decorated back and front with embroidered squares of gold cloth. The imperial diadem was a close-fitting cap adorned with pearls and other jewels, some inserted in the crown and some hanging down to the nape of his neck. Scarlet shoes embroidered with jewels completed this ensemble. After dressing, the emperor would emerge,

attended by officers of the royal wardrobe, and would pray before the icon of Christ and then after breakfasting - would enter one of the throne rooms.

If an important event was scheduled, special arrangements were made. An audience given to the Arab ambassadors from Tarsus in the tenth century was held in the great hall of the Magnaura Palace. The room was lit by golden candelabra hung from silver chains and the floors covered with ivy and laurel, rosemary and roses; as they were stepped upon, the air filled with sweet perfume. Costly Persian carpets lay at the entrance. On either side of the throne stood the *candidatoi*, imperial guards from noble families, dressed in white and carrying scepters. A choir was stationed above to chant acclamations. The Arab envoys entered the imperial presence wearing robes specially ordered for them by the emperor.

An account written by Liutprand, future Bishop of Cremona, of his reception by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus reveals the typical grandiosity of royal meetings. As Liutprand, escorted by two eunuchs, approached the Emperor, the machinery of the throne went into operation: Mechanical birds sang and lions roared. Liutprand, forewarned about this peculiarity, made his prescribed three prostrations before the throne. When he rose, the emperor and the throne had disappeared. Glancing upward, he saw both hovering near the ceiling. It was from there that the emperor continued his audience with the surprised Liutprand.

Receptions like these took place in the mornings and afternoons. Banquets took place in the evenings and were sometimes held in a large hall known as the Tribunal of the Nineteen Couches; it was still fashionable for diners to recline on couches in the Roman style. The entertainment at these banquets might include Greek dancing, readings from St. John Chrysostom, even Hindu jugglers.

The emperor's ceremonial life was rich and varied. He had a series of public functions to perform, all involving pomp and pageantry. The most spectacular of these were related to the empire's military campaigns. Since the monarch, as Christ's representative on earth, was defender and champion of the faith, every military expedition was a holy war; the accompanying ceremonies were appropriately solemn.

One occasion for such pageantry might be a review of the troops before they set out against foreign enemies, be they Russian, Bulgar, or Persian. The parade ground was situated near the apex of the Golden Horn, where the great walls enclosing the city met the sea to the northwest. All the palaces and towers and churches there would be hung with banners, many bearing the imperial eagle. At the climax of the ceremony, the emperor would be rowed up the Golden Horn in his royal galley. The troops would then be assembled: Dalmatians dressed in their national uniforms, armed with swords and lances; the imperial guards, some wearing rose-colored tunics; royal guards - the *hetairia* - sporting silver belts and gilded shields, carrying swords and double-edged axes. As the emperor disembarked, he would surround himself with the impressive Varangian Guard - flaxen-haired, ax-wielding warriors.

An even more impressive scene would be the triumphant return of the emperor from war. He would ride his white horse through the Golden Gate into the city, then make his way down the flower-strewn highway between houses hung with Babylonian tapestries and Persian embroideries to the square of the Augustaeum. Once greeted by the Patriarch and Prefect, the procession would continue in the Forum of Constantine or in the Hippodrome. Here, the captives taken in the war would be paraded before the emperor and the high dignitaries of the court. At the pinnacle of the pageant, the emperor would place his scarlet boot on the shaved head of the chief prisoner - perhaps a barbarian king or Persian emir - while the other prisoners lay prostrate on the ground and the imperial chanter sang, "Who is great like our God? You are the God who performs miracles."

The empress also played a part in palace and public ceremonies, frequently as an adjunct to the emperor. Unlike other consorts, she wielded a great deal of authority in her own right.

Selecting an empress was a state affair. Traditionally, a group of delegates would be dispatched from the capital to scour the Byzantine territories for a suitable bride. Candidates had to be both beautiful and modest - wealth and rank were not as important - and also had to meet specific requirements regarding the measurements of their bust, waist, and feet. Those who passed this preliminary inspection would then be

brought to Constantinople and paraded before the emperor. Like Paris, the mythological god, he would hand an apple to the girl of his choice. (Not all empresses were chosen in this way. Justinian's wife Theodora was a notable exception.)

One candidate, Casia, who later became a nun and a poet of distinction, lost the throne by speaking out of turn. As the emperor was about to hand her the apple, he remarked that it was through women that evil had entered the world. Casia retorted that it was also through women that the Supreme Being - Jesus Christ - entered the world. Her outspokenness startled the emperor, who quickly selected another candidate.

The empress had her own court in the women's quarters of the palace, with ladies in waiting and a host of servants and dignitaries. Like the emperor, she gave audiences and held banquets, and presented gifts to ladies of the court and visiting princesses. She had her own funds to distribute as she saw fit. Occasionally, an empress even served as the sole ruler.

Certain empresses were renowned for their piety - or their eccentricity. One of these was Empress Zoë (1028-1050), who after fifty years of obscurity came to the throne upon the death of her uncle, Constantine VIII. Though past her prime, she was still a striking woman; Psellus, who never hesitated to disparage the qualities of Byzantine rulers, wrote that, like a well-baked chicken, "every part of her was firm and in good condition."

Zoë was determined not only to make the best of her charms but to preserve them in any way she could. With typical Byzantine ingenuity, she transformed her private chambers into a laboratory for the manufacture of face creams. Using her wrinkle-free beauty to her advantage, she procured not one but three husbands who ran the empire (with the assistance of Byzantium's corps of civil servants). Only in her late sixties would she admit that her beauty had begun to fade, and she turned to studying her devotions as she had her chemicals. She died at seventy-two, serene and still lovely.

Many of the Byzantine empresses, like Justinian's Theodora, were strong and effective leaders who helped maintain the authority of the throne. One of the most notable was Irene,

wife of John II Komnenos (1118-1143), who founded the great monastery of St. Savior Pantocrator, where many Byzantine monarchs were later buried.

For Byzantines, however, the true ruler of the empire was Christ himself. It was his word, as written in the Gospels, that stood as the ultimate authority; his cross was carried at the head of military processions; his image was imprinted on coins; laws were enacted in his name. The emperor was merely his earthly instrument for guiding the people into his heavenly kingdom.

Everything connected with the imperial office, from public appearances to the royal inkpot, was regarded as sacred. Everything was dedicated to the service of God. Not only was the emperor himself sacred, but also everything he touched - his garments, his letters, his golden imperial seal. To insult him was blasphemy. To plot against him meant excommunication. Rebellion was apostasy; the punishment was death. This sanctity also covered the emperor's ministers: Just as God had to act through his angels, his earthly representative had to act through court dignitaries and the countless officials, civil and military, who did his bidding. Entrance to public office was an ordination of sorts; to leave it was to rescind a sacred trust.

It was this hierarchy that made up the backbone of the theocratic state. Like many matters Byzantine, the imperial bureaucracy was handed down directly from Rome. As late as the seventh century, Latin was the official language, as were the titles conferred upon the empire's senior officials - *praetorian prefect*, *magister militum*, *quaestor sacri palatii*. But after the seventh century, the Greek language, which had been encroaching on the empire since the sixth century, became official.

Though careers were always open to men of talent, these functionaries were generally recruited from distinguished families with a record of outstanding public service. Officials were nominated, promoted, and dismissed by the emperor. These representatives were responsible for the implementation of the emperor's wishes, which became the law of the state. The policies they carried out were formulated at the imperial palace, where the emperor met with his council of advisors. Ranking government officials were given

honorific titles so that they would take precedence in the imperial household. Since the emperor was directly in touch with the heads of government departments, no formal provision was made for an office like that of prime minister.

The chief administrator at court was the *magister officii*, or master of offices. He was head of the civil service, the secret police, and the postal system, and presided at court ceremonies, including the reception of foreign envoys. Civil service members - like the military - wore uniforms, marked with badges indicating their office and rank. A military-style belt was the insignia of the civil service: Entering service to the state was termed "taking the belt," leaving it was to "give up the belt."

After the theme system was initiated by the Emperor Heraclius early in the seventh century, the administration of the empire's provinces became increasingly militaristic. At the head of each theme, or military province, was a general appointed by the emperor, who wielded almost unlimited power in local affairs. To check against any abuse of power, a civilian was named to serve alongside him, albeit in a subordinate position.

The Byzantines were not inherently militaristic, but military order was needed to defend the empire against its many enemies. The imperial army was not very large - at its peak, only about 120,000 men - but it was expensive to maintain. Because of this, it became necessary to employ military strategy in order to avoid a waste of lives and equipment. In Constantine's time, the Roman army was already moving away from the increasingly dangerous and ineffective legionary system: dangerous because the legionaries could depose an emperor; ineffective because these infantrymen were no match for the barbarian cavalry. A new form of organization emerged, consisting of soldier-farmers who served part-time, plus a mobile, central force that could be deployed where needed. Foot soldiers were equipped with spears, swords, and shields; important cavalry wore steel caps, shirts of mail, gauntlets (armored gloves), and steel shoes and carried long lances and spears, broadswords, and bows and arrows. The other contingent of the armed forces, the fleet, was held in lower esteem than the army, though it was vital in defending Constantinople against Arab attacks.

Because diplomacy was cheaper than war, it was zealously pursued. There was no formal diplomatic service within the imperial government's structure, but it was understood by those serving along the borders or those who came into contact with foreigners that Byzantium's international position was to safeguard itself by peaceful means. Byzantine diplomacy was, on the one hand, marvelously formal, involving sumptuous gifts and lavish ceremonial receptions; it was also perceptive, realistic, and full of treachery. A standard Byzantine maneuver was to honor treaty obligations as a good Christian monarch should but to undermine neighboring states by subsidizing and equipping their enemies and inciting them to attack.

Marriage was yet another Byzantine diplomatic weapon: Noble ladies were sent to foreign courts to marry and civilize distant monarchs, and alien brides were often brought to the imperial throne. Other elements requiring the empire's stringent diplomacy were kings and queens in exile, biding their time until a propitious coup might return them to their thrones, and naive ambassadors from various nations who were led from office to office through a maze of imperial intrigue.

Many of the highest offices in Byzantium were held by eunuchs. Since a eunuch could not be emperor, nor pass on hereditary rights, advancement was easier. Consequently, the Byzantines did not consider castration a disgrace; indeed, noblemen would often castrate their sons to further their chances of advancement and success. At least one emperor, Romanus I, castrated both his legitimate and his illegitimate sons in order to better suit them to the offices he wished them to occupy. Patriarchs of Constantinople were frequently eunuchs, as were commanders in the army or the navy. Narses, Justinian's famous general, was a eunuch; so was Eustathius Cymineanus, the admiral appointed by Alexios I. To become a doctor, castration was an advantage - only eunuchs or women doctors could treat women.

Eunuchs were particularly desirable for posts in civil service; many senior positions were reserved exclusively for them. The presence of eunuchs in the higher ranks of the imperial service served as a check against power falling into the wrong hands and may have been one reason for the stability and reliability of the Byzantine administrative system.

This autocratic system was expensive, cumbersome, and open to corruption. But for more than eleven centuries, it served the emperors well as they sought to hold together the conflicting realities of the empire.



5

CHRISTIANITY IN BYZANTIUM

As Constantine approached Rome in CE 312 to fight his decisive battle at the Milvian Bridge with Maxentius, the rival emperor in the West, he is said to have seen a cross in the sky. This vision led him to affix an image of the Christian cross on his banner, inscribed with the words: "In this sign conquer."

Under the protection of this new standard, he won his decisive victory. After this battle, Constantine called himself a Christian and began the process of transforming the pagan empire into a Christian empire, even though he himself was not baptized into the Christian faith until on his deathbed twenty-five years later. He returned to the Christian church properties confiscated from it during the time of persecutions and affirmed its legal status.

Constantine's conversion planted seeds of conflict that would later affect the religious structure of Byzantium. Constantine had not come to Christianity in a normal way. He had come to it, he believed, through the direct revelation and intervention of God himself. As the liturgical text from the hymn sung on the day of Constantine's Feast puts it, "Like Paul he received a call not from man." Unlike the conversion of a private citizen, his was the conversion of an emperor. This meant that in Constantine's eyes - and in the eyes of others who came to believe like him - both he and the imperial structure had been directly chosen and consecrated by God. The emperor and the empire had received a divine blessing; consequently, they were under the direct protection of the cross. It soon became clear, however, that if the welfare of the state depended on submission to its protector, then its officials and citizens could not hold beliefs that were radically opposed to Christianity. To rid the empire of these disbelievers, Constantine began a persecution of pagans that continued in the reign of his sons. In 341, pagan sacrifices were forbidden; in 353, the cults of idols were declared illegal and their temples closed. In 380, Theodosius the Great (379-395) declared Christianity the official religion of the state.

The adoption of a compulsory state religion was partly the result of a need to unify an empire that embraced a diverse population, split by dissension from within and barbarian invasions from without. In pagan Rome, this unifying force had come from the practice of emperor worship. Prostration

in the presence of an emperor and the burning of incense at the foot of his statue were acts of political allegiance. Could not Christianity now be used in the same way? The Church thought so, rejoicing in its elevated status and its vision of a Christian society in which people were brought to salvation by law as well as by grace.

But the ministers of the Church were forgetting that such a close identification of Church and state was a reversion to pre-Christian practice. The boundaries of the Church's authority had been clearly circumscribed by Christ himself. He had explicitly stated, "My kingdom is not of this world," and had rejected all worldly status and authority. If Christianity were to remain true to its doctrine, it could not fully merge with the state. The very nature of faith demanded separation from political control. In Byzantium, the alliance between Church and state would be a complex relationship.

The conflict was not immediately apparent. What was clear was that Christianity, a long-oppressed religion, had emerged triumphant over its persecutor, the Roman state. This could hardly be seen as anything less than miraculous, a manifestation of God's divine will. But if the Roman Empire was now Christian, a new philosophical framework would have to be created. This political philosophy, conceived by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, was so suited to the needs of state and society that it would endure for more than a millennium.

Mindful of prevailing traditions, Eusebius wove strands from Hellenism and Roman traditions into a Christian framework. From Hellenism came the concept of the emperor as father, benefactor, and savior of his people. From pagan Rome, where the emperors had ruled as gods, came the exalted status of the ruler, who reinforced his power by adopting a pagan divinity. Now the Christian emperor could claim the Christian God as his source of strength. For Constantine, this bond had been forged the moment he submitted to the cross on the eve of his victory at the Milvian Bridge, a triumph that proved - so the theory went - that Constantine had been seated on the throne by God himself. Eusebius wrote: "Thus the God of all . . . appointed Constantine . . . to be prince and sovereign, so that while others have been raised to this distinction by the election of their fellow men, he is the only one to whose elevation no mortal man may boast of having

contributed." As God's chosen instrument, the emperor would rule on earth as God's vice-regent and representative. Just as there was one all-powerful ruler in heaven, there would be one absolute monarch on earth - the ruler of the Roman Empire.

This exalted status, however, brought with it additional responsibilities. The emperor was now answerable to God for both the spiritual and temporal welfare of his subjects.

As the emperor assumed responsibility for religious affairs, it was inevitable that tensions would arise between the state and the Church. In situations where the interests and jurisdiction of the two overlapped, which authority should prevail? This question remained unresolved through the centuries of Byzantium's existence. At times, the emperor would claim supreme authority in religious affairs; at others, the Church would try to establish its superiority over the emperor and state.

These developments had several consequences. First and foremost, the Christian Church rose from the depths it had been driven into by the pagan emperors of Rome. Furthermore, if Byzantine society was to evolve into a Christian one, the Church would have to become the instrument through which this evolution would be carried out. To play its new role effectively, the Church had to adapt its organization to that of the empire.

When Diocletian reorganized the old Roman provinces into dioceses, the early Christians adopted the same plan. To administer the churches in these dioceses, the Church appointed bishops who reported to higher bishops - called metropolitans - whose authority extended beyond the diocese. By Constantine's time, the most important metropolitans were those who presided over the eastern cities of Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea, Ephesus, and Heraclea. A special place of honor was held by the bishop of Rome, considered the successor to Saint Peter.

When Constantine chose Byzantium as his new capital, it was no more than a minor bishopric under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Heraclea. This humble status was clearly unsuitable for the bishops of the newly exalted center of the Roman Empire. Inevitably, Constantinople assumed a

dominant religious position; by 381, the second great Church council declared that the bishop of Constantinople should be given a place of honor among the bishops, second only to the bishop of Rome. A later council, held at Chalcedon in 451, confirmed this hierarchy and in addition, allotted the dioceses of Asia, Pontus, and Thrace to the see of Constantinople, elevating its status to that of Alexandria and Antioch.

This exaltation of the capital reached its peak in the sixth century when Justinian I called the Church at Constantinople "the head of all other churches"; he was also the first to call its bishop "ecumenical," a title the patriarch of Constantinople holds today. The administrative structure of the Church gradually became more centralized, with the bishop of Constantinople at the center, and his subordinate bishops in charge of the administrative subdivisions. To make this organization workable, a permanent synod, or council, was established at Constantinople, presided over by the patriarch, who functioned as its emperor.

As Constantinople transformed into the religious center of the empire, Constantine attempted to mold the city into a "New Jerusalem." He began this process by setting up Christian symbols in prominent places and building the Church of the Holy Apostles and the Hagia Sophia. In subsequent centuries, Constantine's vision of Constantinople as a holy city would deepen and become more compelling.

The most tangible expression of this vision was the increasing number of monuments, memorials, and objects connected with the Christian faith. In the Constantinople's churches, sanctuaries and shrines, relics of the new faith were seen as testaments to God's love and favor.

That Christianity became the required faith of the empire also meant that the state had a vested interest in defining and preserving Church dogma. Before its alliance with the state, Church regulations had been formulated by local councils that dealt with questions of Church organization and dogma. As long as Christianity remained a matter of individual belief and worship, these rules were adequate. But when it became the faith of the emperor - and of his empire - many new questions had to be addressed, from subtle points of doctrine to more practical details.

This need to expound upon matters of Church dogma and discipline resulted in a series of councils - at which the emperor and bishops debated significant issues and made the necessary decisions. Generally, these councils were convened by the emperor when doctrinal disputes threatened to disturb the peace and unity of the state. The First Ecumenical Council met at Nicaea in the spring of 325 to pronounce judgment on the practice of Arianism, a set of teachings by the Alexandrian presbyter Arius concerning the relationship between the son of God and God the father. Subsequent ecumenical councils held at Constantinople in 381, at Ephesus in 431, at Chalcedon in 451, and at Nicaea in 787 were similarly convened to deal with complex theological principles such as the Holy Trinity, the two natures of Christ, or the place and function of icons in Christian worship.

The dispute regarding icons nearly tore the empire apart. Early Christians, who had inherited a Jewish repugnance of idolatry, questioned any veneration of pictures of holy persons. But from the fifth century on, images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints became increasingly prevalent in public and private worship - so much so that it bordered on idolatry. Those in the eastern provinces, whose faiths prohibited religious imagery, became alarmed.

A full-scale attack against the use of icons in worship was launched in 726 when Emperor Leo III ordered them removed from churches and destroyed. Leo had strong support from the army, which had been recruited primarily from the eastern provinces, and from the state bureaucracy, which was as anxious as the emperor to curb the growing power of the Church. The most vehement condemnation of the use of icons came from the western provinces and the clergy, who regarded the practice as sacrilege and heresy.

The attack upon icons raged for more than half a century. At last, in 787, the Empress Irene, a native of the western provinces and an ardent believer in icons, summoned the Seventh Ecumenical Council. At this meeting, the council condemned iconoclasm and made clear the distinction between true worship of God and veneration of an object. As a result, icons were again permitted in churches and public buildings.

But opposition to the restoration of icons was deep-rooted,

and in 813, when eastern Emperor Leo V came to the throne, the icons were again removed and their worshippers persecuted. This time, however, support for iconoclasm had waned. When Empress Theodora became regent, she arranged to have the monk Methodius, a victim of iconoclast persecution, elected to the patriarchal throne. In 843, at the Hagia Sophia, Methodius proclaimed the final restoration of icons, marking the end of iconoclasm, which the Eastern Church regarded as the last of the great heresies.

Theology was not simply a matter of religion for the Byzantines; it was a question of life or death - one's salvation or damnation hinged upon the correct style of worship.

The theology and dogma of his subjects were of great concern to the emperor. An incorrect definition of the nature of Christ or the interpretation of a ritual gesture might prompt a revolution, leading to the overthrow of his dynasty. At the end of the Byzantine period, the majority of the empire's clergy and laity, fearing they would be forced to renounce their religious beliefs, favored surrendering to the Turks rather than accepting help from the Roman West.

Although the state had a vital interest in religious matters, and the Church was eager to participate in the building of the sacred empire, the Church was not blindly obedient to the emperor's wishes. While the leaders of the Church frequently acquiesced to the demands of their sovereign, and vice versa. In the end, neither the Church nor the emperor lost sight of their mutual commitment to promoting the truth of the Church's faith and experience in a Christian state.

The people most concerned with the spiritual lives of the Byzantines, however, were not the official clergy, but the monks and nuns. Monasteries were not simply refuges for those seeking escape from the hardships of life; they were the forging grounds of what the Byzantines considered the highest form of humanity: the saints or holy men. These humble souls had broken through the barrier between man and God and had restored, or remade, the integrity of their human nature.

Not all monks and nuns fulfilled the Christian ideal, of course. While many entered the cloister in search of a life of humility and penitence, others came seeking refuge from disgrace,

poverty, or the burdens of public office. Still others viewed it as a means of advancement to higher ecclesiastical positions; in Byzantium, most of the bishops were recruited from the monasteries. Due to the wealth they amassed from their vast lands, over the centuries, their humility decreased as their power grew. In his description of monastic practices in the tenth century, the pious emperor Nicephorus Phocas observed: "The monks possess none of the evangelical virtues; they think of nothing save the acquisition of land, the erecting of huge buildings and the purchase of vast numbers of horses, cattle, camels and every kind of livestock. All their energies are devoted to their own enrichment, so that their life in no way differs from that of the people living in the world." "What a contrast . . . between this frivolous existence and the lives of the holy [men] who in past centuries dwelt in Egypt, Palestine, and Alexandria, those whose almost immaterialized existence was more that of angels than of men."

Despite its excesses, the common people held monasticism in high esteem. For them, the monk was a source of mercy, miracles, and guidance, and their mediator between earth and heaven. Life for them was a constant struggle between the divine and demonic; where else could a man turn to rid himself of the demons that beset him? If sick, the holy man healed him; if extorted or oppressed by tax collectors or landowners, the saint was there to defend them against the greedy and the powerful. The monk had little to fear and even less to lose - he had already renounced the world and its creature comforts. All that could be taken from him was his mortal life; if he lost that through violence, it might earn him a martyr's crown.

In addition to their spiritual gifts, the monasteries provided most of the scribes and artists who created Byzantium's magnificent illuminated manuscripts; they also wrote hymns and composed liturgical music and created some of the finest mosaics and frescoes. Most of the monastic centers of the Byzantine world have since disappeared, but perhaps the greatest, established on Mount Athos in 963 by St. Athanasius, survives. Filled with countless treasures and works of art, it remains a living testimonial to the Byzantine spirit.



6

DAILY LIFE IN THE EMPIRE

Evidence of the lives led by the men and women of Byzantium remains in unexpected corners of the Greek world - in monastery courtyards on Mount Athos, in the ruins of the hillside town of Mystras, in the Taygetus Mountains near the theater of ancient Sparta, in the caïques of remote Aegean fishing ports.

Here we can glean some of the details of the daily lives of the Byzantines and the social and commercial structure of their society.

The life of the Byzantines was filled with opportunities for self-expression and independence. Even if the Byzantines were informed by their religious beliefs that people were doomed to endless tribulation and suffering and that they could expect little peace or stability, this did not prevent them from celebrating life in a festive manner. They appreciated beauty, which gave their lives the texture of a self-conscious work of art.

Despite their preoccupation with religion and fate, the Byzantines found it easy to relax. Most of their social activities took place outdoors, strolling in the streets and socializing in the spacious open forums. Refreshments were available in cafes and restaurants, where men and women played games similar to dominoes and checkers. Those seeking to escape the congestion of Constantinople could amble through gardens near the water's edge and explore pristine forests and fields just outside the city's gates. Hunting was popular, and the rich played a form of polo.

For those who preferred city life, entertainment could be found in nearby theaters, featuring ballets and musical revues, strolling musicians, and itinerant jugglers. Circuses and carnivals were popular, as were the public baths.

The favorite sport of the Byzantine masses was chariot racing, held at the Hippodrome. At these races, contingents of important citizens formed factions, each of which supported its own entries. While these factions had existed in Roman times, at Byzantium they evolved into powerful organizations structured on the lines of local militia. Originally, there were four factions - the Greens, Blues, Reds and Whites; the Greens and Blues later absorbed the other two.

Each of the surviving factions had its own leader, or *demarch*, who was served by a host of dignitaries and employees: treasurers, notaries, archivists, heralds, poets, musicians, organists, painters and sculptors, charioteers, circus performers, stable hands, and officials assigned to keep order.

In addition to staging the chariot races in the Hippodrome, the factions acted as the emperor's escort in cavalcades and processions and read the official acclamations prepared for state functions. They wore special clothes - cloaks and shoes of the barbarian Huns, tunics with billowing sleeves fastened at the wrist - and wore their hair cropped close in front, with long locks hanging down their backs. These factions provided an outlet for the Byzantines to express their opinions on a variety of subjects, be it cheaper oil, fewer taxes, or the conduct of an unjust official.

On a racing day, the city came alive amid the bustle and commotion as crowds swarmed into the tiers of the Hippodrome's stone seats. In the seats closest to the arena, the members of the factions sat with those of their colors: the Blues to the right of the imperial box, the Greens to the left. Finally, surrounded by generals and patricians, the emperor appeared. At his signal, four doors beneath the royal box opened, and four chariots, each drawn by four horses, dashed into the arena.

The races continued throughout the morning and into the afternoon. After the fourth race was an intermission - a half-time show of sorts - featuring clowns, acrobats, or parades of exotic animals. As they performed, the spectators ate their frugal meals of dried meat, salted fish, cooked beans, watermelons, lemons, and oranges; sometimes the emperor had hams, fruits, and vegetables distributed at his expense. After the interlude, the races resumed, and the roaring populace rocked in its seats as the sand flew beneath the horses' hooves.

Though the power of the factions faded in later centuries, the Hippodrome remained in use until 1204, when the city was captured by the Latins. In the waning years of the empire, the stadium was left deserted, though young nobles still exercised their horses there, or played polo.

In the Hippodrome and throughout Constantinople, the clothes worn by the Byzantines revealed their place in society. By the reign of Justinian, the upper classes had abandoned the Roman toga and replaced it with a long, brocaded coat. Toward the end of the empire, turban-like headdresses and fur-trimmed peaked hats became fashionable. From the seventh century on, beards were common, as shaving was considered vulgar. Artisans and slaves wore a short-sleeved, knee-length woolen tunic girdled at the waist and topped with a hood.

For wealthy women, it was fashionable to wind a scarf around their heads, with the end falling to the shoulders. Over their tunics they wore a cloak with a hood, ample enough to conceal their heads, and jewelry: gold bracelets; necklaces made from precious stones; gold earrings shaped into a half-moon and decorated by figures of animals or birds, separated by a cross. Cosmetics were also popular. The only fault Bertrandon de la Broquière, a visitor to Constantinople in the early fifteen century, could find with the empress was that she had painted her face, though "assuredly she had not any need of it."

Women in Byzantium were both respected and protected; by law, a husband was required to bestow on his wife property equal to the value of her dowry. In certain circumstances, she could control both her own and her husband's property, and in the rearing of her children, she enjoyed equal authority with her husband.

A woman's role in society varied according to her status. The empress, of course, had many opportunities for pleasure independent of the emperor, as did ladies of noble birth. Women lower on the social scale raised their families, assisted the poor, and often worried about their souls. Theoctista, mother of the renowned Abbot Theodore of the monastery of Stoudion was a notable example. She was abstinent and benevolent, sharing her sustenance with the poor and the outcast. On feast days, instead of giving her servants bread, bacon, and cheap wine, she offered them fish, fresh meat, chicken, and better wine. If she occasionally beat her servants, she would fall on her knees and beg their pardon. In the end, she persuaded her husband, her three brothers-in-law, and her children to abandon everything and devote themselves to God.

Theodota, mother of the historian Michael Psellus, was more serene and less austere than Theoctista. Happy in her marriage to a handsome husband, she devoted herself to her son's education. She, too, invited the poor to her table, serving them herself and washing their feet. After Psellus's sister died, Theodota was so overwhelmed with grief that she retired to a convent, where, abstaining from food and drink, she died.

The charitable activities of Theoctista and Theodota were, of course, overshadowed by the philanthropy practiced by the church and prominent citizens. Construction of hospitals and homes for the elderly or infirm was a frequent assignment for the builders and architects of Byzantium. The hospital of the monastery of St. Savior Pantocrator, endowed by John II Komnenos in the twelfth century, contained fifty beds divided into five wards, with separate wards for surgical cases, medical cases, and women. It was staffed by ten male doctors and one female doctor, with a supplementary staff that included a dietitian, herbalist, and professor of medicine to train new doctors.

While charitable work was largely the domain of private patrons or the Church, the everyday life of ordinary citizens was regulated by a system of guilds, administered by public officials. A handbook issued around CE 900, known as "The Book of the Prefect," opens with a preface by the emperor: "Having created all things and made order and harmony reign in the world, God engraved the Law with His own finger on the Tables, and set it forth for all to see so that it might prevent by a happy discipline the members of the human family from hurling themselves one upon the other and the stronger from crushing the weaker. . . . It is for this reason that it has appeared good to our Serenity also to formulate the dispositions which result from the Law, so that the human race is governed as is fitting and so that one person does not oppress another."

Some twenty-one major guilds - some with sub-guilds - controlled the lives of Byzantine artisans and tradesmen. It was up to the prefect of the city to oversee the administration of the guilds; though each guild could appoint its own president, the appointment had to be endorsed by the prefect. The prefect also functioned as chief justice, chief of police, and regulator of the city's commercial and human

traffic. Next to the emperor, the prefect was the most important official in the city.

Any violation of guild regulations was punished by expulsion and compulsory retirement. Guild members could practice only one trade: The goldsmith could deal only with gold, candle-makers with candles, soap-makers with soap. Wages and hours were regulated. The guildsman was financially responsible for his own tools, raw materials, and the articles he fabricated. There were no middlemen - each guildsman offered his product directly to the consumer. Workers could operate only in the particular section of the city authorized by the guild, though grocers, with more perishable goods, were allowed to set up shop anywhere. Guild members were also required to provide various unpaid services, including police work.

The state received ten percent of all imports and exports and imposed additional taxes on goods, inheritances, land, and serf households. The state also operated its own enterprises. The best silk came from the imperial factory, and certain dyes were reserved for use in the imperial household.

But it was the law that had the greatest impact on the lives of Byzantine citizens. The codex revised by Justinian was more Roman than Christian in spirit: Despite the opposition of the Church, divorce and slavery remained legal; at the same time, wives, children, and slaves were given more rights. Most cases were settled in the lower courts of Constantinople and the provinces, but higher profile cases could be taken to an imperial court of twelve judges, or to the emperor himself, who had the last word in appeals. In criminal cases, the punishments were fines, the confiscation of property, death, or the loss of an eye or a hand. After the eighth century, the death penalty was reserved for murder, treason, and desertion; even so, some murderers were spared on the condition that they turn over half their property to their victim's heirs and enter a monastery.

In addition to his supervision of all aspects of Byzantine public and commercial life, the emperor also undertook public works - the building of palaces, fortifications, aqueducts, roads, as well as the manufacture of armaments.

The building regulations in Constantinople were strict. Streets

had to be twelve feet wide. Balconies on private houses had to be fifteen feet above the ground and could not extend within ten feet of the opposite wall. Homeowners with an unobstructed view of the sea (or of gardens or public monuments) had a right to protect that view - though if anyone claimed an infringement upon his view of a monument of historical significance, he had to prove that he had enough education to appreciate it.

The state alone minted the city's currency, a coin containing sixty-five grains of gold called a *nomisma* or *bezant*. For seven centuries, from the reign of Constantine I to Nicephorus III Botaniates, the bezant retained its value. In the eighth century, when the English historian, the Venerable Bede, wished to praise a British princess, he described her as being "pure as a bezant." It was only in the eleventh century that the bezant began to lose universal respect and trust.

Constantinople, strategically situated astride the main routes between Europe and Asia, was the hub of the empire's commercial life. Here, caravans and fleets from all over the globe poured their merchandise into the customs houses, depots, and workshops of the capital. Though many of these goods were passed on to the West, a large percentage remained to provide the raw materials for the city's own workshops, or those of other cities. By the eleventh century, Thebes and Corinth had their own silk industries, and carpets were manufactured in the Peloponnese.

For the Byzantine peasant and the small land-owner, life was much the same as it is for the Turkish or Balkan peasant today - or at least as it was before the introduction of mechanical agricultural implements. But the life of the larger landowner, particularly in Anatolia, was one of affluence and luxury. As early as the eighth century, one of these proprietors could afford to host a dinner party for thirty-six guests, whom he seated around a table made of ivory and gold. This same landowner possessed 12,000 head of sheep, 800 oxen and 900 horses and mules, as well as a large number of serfs.

Since the lives of all Byzantines - artisan, aristocrat, goldsmith, seaman, general, mother - were dominated by religion, the atmosphere was imbued with a sense of the supernatural that frequently bordered on rank superstition.

Because Byzantium was seldom free from the threat of invasion, its citizens lived in a constant state of apprehension. This fear manifested itself at times in wanton cruelty, and at others, in a penchant for astrology and necromancy, divination, and black magic. Dreams and visions, the Byzantines believed, foretold events to come. Inanimate objects might have some crucial influence on a person's life or even on the fate of the empire. Books on numerology or on the meanings of the lunar phases were widely read. Mediums were popular, though probably no more so than today.

Constantinople was believed to be rife with omens, concealed in mysterious inscriptions carved on statues or columns. If deciphered, they might have predicted the terrifying last days of the city.



7

CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Through nearly eleven centuries, Byzantine achievements in literature and the arts reflected not only the dominance of the Christian Church but also the intellectual and artistic tastes of the empire's aristocracy. The upper level of Byzantium's society was a highly cultivated class, with an impassioned regard for learning and a sensitive eye for beauty.

The Byzantines cherished their Greco-Roman heritage, studying and preserving for posterity the writings of the classical past and adding notable contributions of their own. In Byzantium, a good education was considered a major virtue and a must for anyone with ambitions to improve his standing. To be uneducated was a disgrace. To be uneducated and a non-Christian was deemed barbaric.

The basis for this superior education was a knowledge of classical culture - the speech and literature of the ancient Hellenic world. There was no intellectual break with the Greco-Roman pagan civilization, even among those who would become the masters of theology of the Christian Church.

Throughout most of Byzantine history, the course of studies remained more or less constant, though many changes took place in educational institutions. Grammar - the correct use of classical Greek - was paramount. Until Justinian came to power, students were taught both Latin and Greek, but by then, Latin as the language of the state was dying out. By the middle of the seventh century, Greek had completely taken over. But there were still linguistic problems. In addition to the vernacular Greek spoken by the lower and middle classes, the Byzantine upper classes adopted a purified dialect akin to the classical Greek of Thucydides and Demosthenes. This became the spoken and written language of the court and of more formal secular literature.

Included in grammar was the study of classical literature. This required a familiarity with all the major classical authors, particularly Homer. After the Bible, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were the best known and most frequently quoted works.

University-like centers of learning sprang up throughout the empire. Many of the schools famous in pagan times, including those at Alexandria, Antioch, Beirut and Athens, continued to

flourish well into the Christian era. In addition, Constantine the Great encouraged education by founding a school at his new capital, and in 425, Theodosius II opened the university at Constantinople. The staff at the university included five Greek and three Latin sophists or rhetoricians, ten Greek and ten Latin grammarians, two jurists, and a philosopher. Between the seventh and ninth Centuries, however, education in Byzantium entered a dark period: The university at Athens had been closed by Justinian in 529, and now the schools at Alexandria, Antioch, and Beirut passed into Muslim hands. Nevertheless, opportunities for higher learning were still present, and private teachers were always available to those who could afford them.

In the eleventh century, the university at Constantinople was revived and several new schools were established there, although another dim period would follow after the sack of Constantinople in 1204. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the quest for knowledge underwent a resurgence. Around this time, the Byzantines remembered their pagan heritage with special pride and began to call themselves "Hellenes" rather than "Romaioi" (Romans).

As a result of the emphasis on the classics, the secular literature produced by the Byzantines tended to mimic the ancient style. Yet there were exceptions, especially in poetry. Many of the poems written in Atticized Greek convey a wit and sensitivity reminiscent of the romantic poets of seventeenth-century England.

Of the poetry written in the vernacular language, Byzantium produced one of the greatest of all epic poems, *Digenes Akrites*. This dramatic eleventh-century work tells the tale of a frontier far from the sophisticated, formal atmosphere of the Byzantine court. Here, where fighting between Muslims and Christians was sporadic and bands of robbers were a constant threat, a militaristic aristocracy emerged. This individualistic society set the stage for the heroic exploits of the border lord Digenes, who, among other impressive deeds, courted and kidnapped the daughter of a Byzantine general, then married her.

Another field enriched by the works of the Byzantines was history. In the sixth century, Procopius detailed the wars fought by Justinian. In the eleventh century, Michael Psellus

documented the history of that age, and Anna Komnene – among the greatest of historians – described the reign of her father, Emperor Alexios I. The memoirs of John VI Cantacuzene, written after his abdication as emperor in 1354, are still a valuable resource for the study of the Balkan regions in the fourteenth century.

The secular literature of the Byzantines, however, was eclipsed in quality by its religious literature, written by the likes of St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. Maximus the Confessor, whose works had a profound effect on the Christian Church.

The psalms of Byzantium rank with the great literary treasures of the Western world. Their inspirational lyrics resonate with a dramatic human intensity, recalling the drama of the ancient Greeks or the medieval miracle plays of Western Europe. Some of the outstanding psalmists were Romanus the Melode, considered the greatest poet of the Byzantines; St. John of Damascus, composer of some of the finest hymns of the Byzantine Christian Church; the nun Casia, who devoted her life to composing religious poems; and St. Simeon the New Theologian, who wrote fervent mystical odes.

In architecture, too, the religious surpassed the secular. The secular architecture of the Byzantine Empire, accessible mainly through archeological excavations, is unexceptional; like the Roman aqueducts, they are remarkable more for their engineering than their architectural design. The true splendor of Byzantine architecture can be found in its churches, many of which still stand.

In the early days of the empire, architects established a distinctive ecclesiastical style evocative of the fourth- and fifth-century architecture of Pergamum, Ephesus, Miletus, and other Greek cities near the Aegean coast. From here, the basic architectural elements of the Byzantine church – multiple vaulting, the dome, and the centralized design – evolved.

The centralized design stemmed from the custom, common in fifth century-Greek basilicas of worshipping in the central nave of the church instead of at one end of the rectangular structure, which made the rest of the space superfluous.

Gradually, Byzantine church builders adopted a more compact and suitable floorplan, that of a Greek cross.

Vaulting, the technique of constructing curved ceilings made of masonry, was borrowed from the secular architecture of the Greek coastal cities, where it was frequently used in palaces and public buildings. The idea of a crowning dome, however, seems to have had its origin in the use of domes over the tombs of early Christian martyrs, and in the domed buildings of Rome and Persia. These three aspects - the centralized plan, the vault, and the dome - formed a whole new architectural style.

Byzantium's architecture falls into three recognizable periods - Early, Middle, and Late - each distinct in its characteristics. It was in the Early Byzantine period from the early sixth to the mid-ninth centuries that a standard centralized church type was first established. The monumental Hagia Sophia, built between 532 and 537 in Constantinople, is not only the biggest but the finest example. Its unique plan, enormous size, and the richness of its carved marble mark the Hagia Sophia as the crowning glory of Byzantine architecture. But the uniqueness of the Hagia Sophia separates it from the mainstream of architectural development.

Typically, the Early Byzantine church was small and cross-shaped. Thick piers supported a dome over the intersection of the cross; barrel vaults spanned each of the four arms. Though the church was small, the simplicity of its design and the light streaming through the windows of the walls and dome made it seem much larger. The church's exterior, incorporating a few simple geometric shapes and single-arched, unadorned windows, was plain but impressive.

This idea of a simply designed church spread to Greece and throughout Anatolia. More distant parts of the empire, however, retained many of their earlier features or developed new styles of their own that were largely independent of Early Byzantine architecture. Sixth- and seventh-century churches in Mesopotamia and Egypt looked much like those from the fourth and fifth century - dome-less oblong basilicas. In Bulgaria and Armenia, on the other hand, more sophisticated styles emerged, displaying a richness of architectural effects not found in Early Byzantine churches. These were often based on circular or octagonal floor plans.

During the Middle Byzantine era (late ninth to mid-thirteenth centuries), there was no longer one single church type, but four, each consisting of a domed core made up of various combinations of the cross, the octagon, and the square. The most common type, called the cross-in-square, likely evolved from the Early Byzantine domed-cross church. In the cross-in-square church, however, the vaulted areas in the cross arms were united to the cruciform core by smaller dome-supporting piers or columns. This visual link made the church appear broader, and gave it an intricacy and subtlety lacking in Early Byzantine structures.

During this period, the simplicity of earlier churches vanished. Where before a window was spanned by a single arch, it was now divided into two or three arches. The windows were fewer and smaller; as a result, the interior of the churches grew darker. Carved stone ornamented their interiors; on the exteriors, bricks were laid in decorative patterns and moldings framed the doors and windows. The silhouettes of the buildings became more dramatic - the dome now rested upon a high cylindrical drum, and buttresses and half-columns projected from the body of the church.

A number of distinct architectural schools flourished throughout the Middle Byzantine period. In Cappadocia in east-central Anatolia, for instance, tiny churches were carved out of living rock, copying larger free-standing buildings. In Greece, the exteriors of churches were adorned with intricately patterned brickwork. In Italy, Middle Byzantine architecture was crude and provincial, frequently influenced by Western architectural traditions. The exception is St. Mark's in Venice; St. Mark's, however, is not so much a Middle Byzantine church as it is an eleventh-century copy of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, rebuilt by Justinian on the site of Constantine's original.

The four basic church types of the Middle Byzantine era, with their individual stylistic features, continued into the Late Byzantine period, which lasted until the fall of Constantinople in 1453. But there were differences. Architects of the Late Byzantine period stressed verticality; they achieved this effect by using columns, piers, and buttresses, as well as increasing the height of the buildings. Middle Byzantine churches usually had one dome; those of the Late period often had five - a large dome over the center and a smaller one over each

corner.

Late Byzantine churches outside of Constantinople also featured intricate brickwork, blind arches, and other decorative devices. But the effects of these embellishments were seldom of the same quality that had marked Byzantine architecture during earlier eras.

As notable as Byzantium's contributions to architecture were, it is the empire's other arts for which it is remembered. In architecture, as in literature, music, and in the other aspects of Byzantine culture, the Church provided the venue for the creativity of the era's artists, who adorned church interiors with mosaics and frescoes and other embellishments.

The art of the Byzantine Empire, while primarily the art of the Church, was also the art of Constantinople. The capital's artistic importance was based on the fact that nearly all the wealthy and educated patrons of the arts resided there: the emperor and his court; the aristocracy and the rich merchants; the monastic orders and the patriarchate. Though the empire itself shrank in size, the stability and continuity of cultural life in the capital went undiminished, century after century.

The concentration of power and wealth in one city affected Byzantine art in several ways. First, Constantinople's continuity of culture nurtured a strong artistic tradition. A twelfth-century artist in Constantinople, for example, was surrounded by the works of earlier Byzantine artists; by emulating them, he studied their forms and learned from what he saw.

Second, the art produced in Constantinople - illuminated manuscripts, icons, ivories, and metalwork - were exported to every quarter of the empire and beyond. The city's artists were commissioned by administrators, princes, and churchmen throughout the empire to generate murals and other private and public works of art. The art produced in Constantinople set the standards for quality throughout the empire.

Yet a distinctively Byzantine style did not emerge until the sixth century; its roots were formed in early Christian art. In the second and third centuries, this art was almost

exclusively tomb art - frescoes and sarcophagi - decorating the catacombs at Rome. The figures - Christ as a shepherd, for example, had depth and freedom of movement, with attention paid to facial features and muscularity.

In the early fourth century, as Christianity moved into the forefront, Christians began to build churches and decorate their interiors. Though they continued to draw upon the classical style of pagan Rome, they now began to modify classicism and to create a style of their own.

Central to the growth of this new style was Roman imperial portraiture of the late third and early fourth centuries, which called for an impersonal, almost symbolic representation, emphasizing an emperor's divine majesty rather than a true likeness. From this, the Christians adopted a more formal, less naturalistic style. Throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, these two styles - classic naturalism and the new formalism - existed side by side, mixing occasionally, but not too successfully.

In the sixth century, the age of Justinian, the first successful fusion of the styles took place. The result can be seen in Early Byzantine ivory carvings and silverwork produced until the early eighth century. These works assumed the naturalistic figures and rhythmic composition of classical art, but a more abstract face was substituted, flat and nearly featureless.

The surviving works of Early Byzantine art rest in cities far from Constantinople - Ravenna, Mount Sinai, Rome, and elsewhere in Europe. Unfortunately, almost all Early Byzantine art in Constantinople was destroyed during the iconoclastic controversy that swept the empire between 726 and 843.

The earliest works of Middle Byzantine church art seem to have been modeled on works of Justinian's reign, particularly the classical works of the sixth century. In the early tenth century, during the rule of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, the classical style was further refined. This highly classical art continued into the late tenth century, primarily in secular works. An example is the Veroli casket, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, in which the subjects - scenes from mythology - as well as the style - stem from classical antiquity.

From the late tenth century on, however, the greater part of church art took on a more sophisticated abstract style. This trend can be seen in the religious ivories, manuscripts, and metal works of the late tenth to twelfth centuries, which display the elongated figures, bland features, and intricate linearism of the hieratic convention.

With the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, the production of Byzantine art abruptly ceased. Illuminated manuscripts, however, continued to be made in the Middle Byzantine style of the previous three centuries. From 1261, when a Byzantine emperor again resumed the throne, until the mid-fifteenth century - the Late Byzantine period - even fewer works of art were produced; many of these lacked the perfection and originality of Middle Byzantine creations. But in the mosaics and frescoes of the Church, the highest standards were maintained.

Unlike Church art of earlier periods, later Byzantine art was infused with a livelier style, and its subject matter expanded: Artists no longer fixated on one subject; secondary figures began to appear in the scenes of the Life of Christ, and the figures were no longer static. Christ, for example, was now depicted in motion, pulling Adam out of hell.

The final era of Byzantine art saw a return to naturalism, but one in which the emphasis was placed on emotions rather than physicality - on Christ's Passion, for example, and on the sorrow and tenderness of Mary. The naturalistic figures of classical art and the abstract, expressionless faces of the hieratic style were replaced by more humane and compelling features.

Throughout its 1,000-year history, Byzantine art continued to influence the art of Eastern and Western Europe, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This era produced, among others, the mosaics in the cathedrals in Torcello near Venice and at Monreale and Cefalù in Sicily. The glorious beginnings of the Renaissance - the age of Cavallini, Duccio and Giotto - rested largely on exceptional Byzantine art.



8

BYZANTIUM IN DECLINE

Michael Psellus, the Byzantine philosopher and chronicler of the eleventh century, witnessed no signs of decline in the empire during his lifetime, though he found much to criticize. Psellus condemned the excessive expenditures of the later Macedonian imperial house, whose members competed with one another in building extravagant memorials to their reign. "The imperial treasury was opened up and the gold kept there was allowed to pour forth like a river," Psellus wrote, adding that uncontrolled spending could be disastrous for the state. He also witnessed what he considered a dangerous rivalry for power between the civil aristocracy of the capital and the landed nobility. Although he did not acknowledge the disintegration taking place, Byzantium was already in decline.

There were many factors that led the 1,123-year-old empire to its doom, significantly, power struggles within the empire, and changes in the social structure. External forces also played a part: One was the increasing trade in the West, which resulted in a severe drop in Byzantine commerce. Another was the clash between the Western Church at Rome and the Eastern Church at Constantinople, which worked to the empire's disadvantage. Finally, there were the Muslim Turks. It was Turkish power that ultimately erased Constantinople as both an independent and a Christian force.

But in the middle of the eleventh century, none of this was evident. In the years following the end of the Macedonian dynasty in 1056, the nobility within the capital and the large landowners, together with the leaders of the army, vied for power. In 1081, Alexios Komnenos succeeded in attaining the throne, marking the supremacy of the landowners and the army.

The reigns of Alexios Komnenos (1081-1118), his son John II (1118-1143), and his grandson Manuel I (1143-1180) spanned a century. Manuel, a gifted soldier, statesman, and theologian, dreamed of restoring the glory of Byzantium just as Justinian had dreamed of restoring the Roman Empire. Like Justinian, he launched attacks on Italy with little success. Attracted to Western customs and culture, he introduced chivalry to the Byzantine court and appointed Latins to influential positions in the state. Though this renewed contact with the West produced a flurry of innovative ideas among the Byzantines, Manuel's extravagance and the expense of his military campaigns brought the state to the verge of

bankruptcy. As the tax burden on the peasantry increased, many small landholders were forced to sell their farms to the increasingly powerful semi-feudal magnates. It was during the reign of the Komnenos family that the power of the landed aristocracy grew to rival the authority of the state.

At the same time, pressure from external forces increased. Since the tenth century, the West had coveted Byzantine treasures; brocades, onyx cups, miniatures, reliquaries studded with jewels, and magnificent works in gold or enamel had been peddled by Italian and Jewish merchants throughout France and England, the burghs of the Rhine, and the palaces of Italy. Contributing to Byzantium's appeal was its political and cultural propaganda, in the form of lavish gifts to foreigners, evidence of the state's unlimited wealth and splendor.

Many Western rulers were tempted by the riches of Constantinople. In the eleventh century, the most dangerous of these was Robert Guiscard, the ambitious leader of the Normans, who, by 1071, had conquered all the Byzantine possessions in southern Italy. Guiscard now planned to subjugate the rest of the empire and seize the imperial crown for himself. Alexios Komnenos, mindful of the weakness of his own land and naval forces, sought help from the Venetians.

With the aid of Venice and the opportune death of Guiscard, the Normans were repulsed and Byzantium was saved. But the Venetians extracted a high price: unlimited trading privileges throughout the empire. As Alexios's successors came to depend more and more on the Italians for Byzantium's defense, concessions had to be made to the Genoese and Pisans as well. As Constantinople's grip on trade weakened, its fortunes dwindled.

With the incursion of Italian trade came the deterioration of the relations between the two Christian Churches. Some of the disputes were purely theological, but others were political. The crowning of Charlemagne as emperor by Pope Leo III in 800 had been viewed by Constantinople as an attack on the sovereignty of the Byzantine emperor. In the eleventh century, the papacy began to press its claims to spiritual authority as well, asserting that the Byzantine Church should be subordinate to the Roman See.

Rome and Constantinople also competed for jurisdictional rights over newly converted Christian territories. In the ninth century, they argued over the missionary efforts of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in Moravia in Central Europe. A similar dispute concerning Bulgaria was resolved in favor of Constantinople only when the Byzantines agreed to allow the Bulgarians to establish a semi-autonomous Bulgarian archbishopric. The question of jurisdictional rights in Byzantine territories in southern Italy was one of the primary reasons for the schism between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople in 1054.

The deterioration of the relationship between the two halves of Christendom eventually led to Turkish domination of Byzantium. The Byzantines had been in contact with the Turkish Empire in Central Asia since the sixth century, but in later centuries, as Turkish tribes were forced to move westward, these contacts increased. Two Byzantine emperors had in fact married Turkish princesses of the Khazar tribe, which had converted to Judaism after its migration to the region north of the Black Sea. Other Turkish tribes had supplied mercenaries to both the Byzantine emperor and the Arab caliph, who ruled his theocratic empire from Baghdad. Many of these mercenaries settled within the borders of the Byzantine and the Arab empires, becoming Christians or Muslims accordingly.

It was the Turks under the rule of the caliph who first became a threat to Byzantium; as the centralized power of Baghdad in this area declined, the power of the Turks increased. The first Muslim Turk to build up a powerful state was a prince by the name of Mahmud of Ghazni. By the beginning of the eleventh century, Mahmud controlled an empire that stretched from northeastern Persia to the Punjab. Upon his death, control of his caliphate passed into the Seljuk family. By the middle of the eleventh century, the Seljuk ruler Tugrul had conquered not only Persia from the caliph but also the oasis of Khorezm, east of the Caspian Sea. In 1055, the Seljuks marched on Baghdad, the seat of the caliphate. Surrendering the city, the caliph relinquished temporal control over his provinces to the Seljuk chieftain, though he retained religious control.

Meanwhile, other Turkish warriors were raiding Byzantine territories. Alarmed, Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes decided

to strike against them. In August 1071, the Byzantine and Turkish armies, led by Tugrul's successor, Alp Arslan, met at Manzikert. In a decisive battle, Alp Arslan defeated the Byzantines and took the emperor captive.

Alp Arslan was lenient and did not press his advantage. He released the emperor and resumed his conquest of Syria. But the southern and eastern borders of the Byzantine Empire were now virtually defenseless, and the Turkish *ghazi* - warriors for the faith - were professional raiders and fighters. With little opposition, they penetrated into Byzantine territory and settled in the areas they had won. At their mercy, the Christians often fled, leaving their lands and villages unoccupied.

By the end of the eleventh century, the *ghazis* had overrun the greater part of Anatolia, leaving only a few coastal districts in Byzantine hands. The Seljuk Turks, alarmed at the *ghazis'* growing independence and power, sought to unify them into a single Islamic kingdom. When this had been done, in the early twelfth century, the Byzantines were left with the coastal districts and the fertile valleys of western Anatolia, and the Turks the whole hinterland, with their capital at Konya.

One of the repercussions of the Byzantine defeat at Manzikert was that it alerted the West to Byzantium's precarious position. As the Seljuks captured the Holy Land from the Arabs, apprehension increased in the West. The idea of a crusade to liberate the holy places of Palestine began to grow, and the Roman papacy, anxious to expand its power, began to regard Byzantium as a land to be "saved."

In the decades following 1054, the Turkish triumphs in Asia Minor were interpreted by Rome as divine retribution for the schism between the churches. "Great pain and universal sorrow obsess me," wrote Pope Gregory VII to Hugh, Abbot of Cluny. "The Church of the Orient is moving further from the Catholic faith, and the devil, having killed it spiritually, causes its members to perish in the flesh by the sword of his henchmen lest at any time divine grace bring them to a better mind." This justification allowed the Roman Church to view the return of Byzantium's imperial territories to papal jurisdiction as a victory over the powers of darkness; Constantinople itself was seen as the key to papal dominion

over Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Near East. The secular rulers in the West were equally tempted by the prize of Byzantium.

In 1095, at the Council of Clermont, Pope Urban II roused the West to action. The following year, a disorganized rabble of Crusaders led by Peter the Hermit reached Anatolia, where they were easily killed by the Turks. A few months later, more resolute armies, led by Norman nobles joined the fray. A few of the leaders were motivated by religious zeal, but more were driven by a lust for adventure and the promise of riches. The Byzantines demanded that the Crusaders return any former Byzantine city recaptured from the Turks to Constantinople's rule. Though Bohemund, the leader of the Norman army, honored his pledge in Nicaea and other places, he kept Antioch for himself. The Crusaders established other principalities at Edessa, Jerusalem, and Tripoli. But in 1137, the Komnenian emperor John II reasserted his claim as ruler of Antioch, and in 1144, the Muslims recaptured Edessa.

With the fall of Edessa in 1147, St. Bernard of Clairvaux called for a second Crusade. Led by Conrad III of Germany and King Louis VII of France, this army won no victories over the Muslims, but the political designs of the West on Byzantium became clear when, in the middle of the Crusade, the Normans seized the Byzantine island of Corfu and, landing on the Greek mainland, captured Thebes and Corinth.

In 1187, the Muslims recaptured Jerusalem, and two years later, the Third Crusade marched south. When it failed to regain Jerusalem, the German king, Conrad III, threatened to take Constantinople. During a dispute with the Byzantine emperor, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa ordered that preparations be made for an attack on the city, but the emperor yielded to Frederick's demands, and the threat was averted.

In 1203, the Fourth Crusade, originally bound for Egypt and the Holy Land, was diverted to Constantinople by the Venetians. The elderly doge of Venice, Enrico Dandolo, hated the Byzantines: Thirty years earlier, while being held hostage in Constantinople, he had been blinded by the Greeks through exposure to a concave mirror that reflected the sun's rays. Seeking revenge and coveting the economic advantages Venice would gain from the conquest of Byzantium, Dandolo

proposed - falsely - to return a deposed emperor to the Byzantine throne. After a series of battles, betrayals, and treachery, in 1204, the Crusaders sacked the city and pillaged it mercilessly.

With the conquest of Constantinople, the emperor, Alexios V Dukas Mourtzouphlos, fled. Behind him, his people suffered at the hands of their fellow Christians - the classic fate of losers. Churches, palaces, monasteries, and libraries, as well as the fine villas of the rich and the hovels of the poor, were indiscriminately sacked by soldiers and clerics alike and the women raped. In the Hagia Sophia, the conquerors turned the altars into gaming tables and placed a prostitute on the throne.

During this ransacking of the city, fires burned throughout Constantinople, destroying nine centuries of treasured works of art. Byzantine historian Nicetas lamented: "Oh, city, city, eye of all cities, subject of narratives over all the world, spectacle above the world, supporter of churches, leader of faith, guide of orthodoxy, protector of education, abode of all good! Thou hast drunk to the dregs the cup of the anger of the Lord and hast been visited with fire fiercer than that which in days of yore descended upon the five cities."

What was not destroyed by fire or vandalism was carted off by the invaders. No one, wrote Villehardouin, a leader of the Crusaders, could possibly count the gold and silver, the plates and jewels, the silks and furs seized by the Westerners; never had so much loot been confiscated in a single city.

As the empire collapsed, members of the deposed Byzantine court established themselves in three principalities: at Nicaea, in western Anatolia; on the southeast shores of the Black Sea; and in Epirus, on the western coast of the Balkan Peninsula - the remainder of the empire was divided between Venice and the Latin princes. The Venetians acquired the entire Eastern trade and established colonies along the coast and on many of the islands. In the European sections of the empire, a number of petty, semi-feudal territories were set up in servitude to Baldwin of Flanders, who was crowned emperor of the Latin Empire of Constantinople. The Latin conquerors, however, were unable to retain their territorial gains. As the detested Roman Church was forced on the local population, Baldwin and his successors had difficulty keeping

their vassals in check.

Meanwhile, Nicaea was becoming more and more powerful. In July 1261, the Nicaean ruler, Michael Palaiologos, with assistance from Genoa, captured Constantinople. The Latin-installed emperor and patriarch fled, together with the Venetian trader-colonists.

The Byzantine Empire now entered its final phase of its history under the founder of its last dynasty, the Palaiologos. The two final centuries, though they were brilliant intellectually and artistically, were little more than years of fighting against overwhelming odds. The empire Michael Palaiologos regained was confined to Constantinople, the northwest corner of Anatolia, and a belt stretching across the center of the Balkans. Italians, particularly the Genoese, still dominated the empire's trade. Latin lords and Venetian traders managed to retain their holdings on the Greek mainland and the islands.

The authority of the central government was crippled, and the administrative machinery now depended largely on the cooperation of the independent landowners and local governors. Civil wars and dynastic quarrels further weakened the state (John V, though he reigned for fifty years, was deposed three times, by his father-in-law, son, and grandson). The Black Death, which struck in 1347, killed almost two-thirds of Constantinople's population. By the end of the fourteenth century, the city's population numbered only about 100,000 - one-sixth of its population two centuries earlier. As money grew short, the splendor of the Byzantine court vanished. "The jewels in the crowns were glass, the robes not real cloth-of-gold but tinsel, the dishes copper, while all that appeared to be rich brocade was only painted leather," wrote a contemporary observer.

Ominously, a new Turkish power, the Ottoman emirate, had been building up in northwestern Anatolia, ready to break into Europe. Although initially subjects of the Seljuk Empire, the Ottoman Turks had won their independence as the Seljuk Empire disintegrated under the impact of the Mongol invasions. In 1301, the Byzantines lost their first battle with the Ottomans at Baphaeum, between Nicaea and Nicomedia. In 1326, the Turks captured Brusa, then Nicaea in 1329 and Nicomedia in 1337. In 1356, Ottoman troops crossed the

Dardanelles and invaded Europe. By 1362, they had conquered western Thrace, and in 1365, they established their capital at Adrianople. In 1387, Thessaloniki fell. The Turks defeated the Serbs at Kosovo in 1389, and in 1394, ravaged the Peloponnese. By 1397, all that was left to the Byzantines was the city of Constantinople and a small area north of it, as well as some territory in the Peloponnese. The Turks then surrounded Constantinople and demanded its surrender. The city was saved - albeit temporarily - by the Mongols under Tamerlane, who met and defeated the Ottoman forces at Ankara in July of 1402.

The citizens of Constantinople received a welcomed reprieve when dynastic quarrels broke out among the Ottomans. They might have taken better advantage of the situation to recoup some of their losses but could not do so without Western assistance; for that, they would have to submit to Rome.

Over the years, attempts had been made to bring about a reconciliation between the two Christian Churches. Michael VIII Palaiologos committed his people to uniting with Rome at the Council of Lyons in 1274, only to have his decision repudiated by his son, Andronikos II. In 1369, Emperor John V personally submitted to the pope in Italy. But the majority of the populace were too loyal to the Orthodox Church to consider theological concessions for political gain, and memories of the Fourth Crusade had left them suspicious of Latin motives. "Better the Sultan's turban than the Cardinal's hat" wrote Lucas Notaras, Byzantium's last Grand Admiral of the Fleet - a sentiment that expressed the popular attitude.

In 1413, the dynastic struggles among the Turks subsided under a new sultan, and in 1422, the Turks were again at the walls of Constantinople. A revolt in Anatolia saved Byzantium this time, but the Turkish army again ravaged the Peloponnese. The emperor, John VIII Palaiologos, made one last attempt to enlist Western aid. Accompanied by a number of bishops and theologians, he sailed to Italy and met with representatives of the Latin Church.

After endless debate, in 1439, the Orthodox and Latin Churches agreed to reunite. Though some of the Orthodox representatives did not endorse the decision, the pope was encouraged. In 1440, when the Turks attempted to capture Belgrade, he was roused to preach another crusade against

the Turks - this one to be led by King Vladislav of Poland and Hungary. Troops recruited by the pope in the West were commanded by a papal legate, Cardinal Julian Cesarini. In 1444, the Crusaders reached Varna, on the shores of the Black Sea, where they were attacked by the Turks. In the resulting rout, both King Vladislav and Cardinal Cesarini were killed. In 1448, the Turks defeated another Hungarian force, this time on the plain of Kosovo. It was the final Western attempt to support the dying empire. The last years of Byzantium had come.

In 1451, a new sultan, Mehmet II, inherited the Turkish throne and immediately began preparation to capture Constantinople. To ensure that the city's colossal walls would not impede the attack, Mehmet enlisted the skill of a Hungarian engineer who provided the sultan's army with cannons powerful enough to smash the massive masonry of the walls. The largest of these measured twenty-six feet in length and fired balls weighing 1,200 pounds.

Mehmet's troops, the Janissaries, comprised of men taken from Christian homes and brought up in special schools, were exceptionally disciplined and diligently trained. They had their own barracks, were forbidden to marry, and constituted an elite, religious-military fraternity, with a dedication similar to those of the Templars.

Mehmet took two years to complete his preparations. On March 23, 1453, he set out from Adrianople. On April 5, he arrived outside the walls of Constantinople, where the bulk of his army had already taken up its positions.

The city - weakened, impoverished, diminished - was all that was left of the empire. The emperor, Constantine XI Palaiologos, had little hope of foreign aid, though near the end of the siege, the pope dispatched three galleys filled with arms and food, which arrived in time to be of use. After much debate, Venice sent two transports, and later, fifteen galleys, but these left Venice too late and never reached Constantinople.

To defend his debilitated city, Constantine rallied a force of 7,000 Byzantines and 2,000 foreigners. The foreigners were mostly Venetian and Genoese, the latter under the command of the brilliant Giovanni Giustiniani Longo. The defenders

were well armed with javelins, arrows, muskets, and mangonels for casting stones, but they faced a force of at least 80,000 men - all professional soldiers.

On April 11, the bombardment began. The defense was heroic. Not only did the defenders keep watch all day, at night they managed to repair the breaches in the walls. On April 18, a first assault by Turkish troops was repulsed. On April 22, however, the sultan, employing all his resources, captured the Golden Horn.

The Turkish fleet had previously tried to break through the chain stretched across the entrance to the Horn but had been beaten back by the handful of Christian ships guarding it. The Sultan was humiliated. It was probably an Italian in his camp who suggested that they haul the ships overland from the Bosphorus and slip them into the Horn from behind the city's defenses. In Italy, the Venetians had recently dragged an entire fleet over the flat terrain that separated the River Po from Lake Garda. But there was no flat ground here - the ridges surrounding Constantinople were 200 feet above sea level. Nevertheless, Mehmet was determined. Within weeks, his men had laid more than a mile of roadway between the Bosphorus and the Horn. On April 21, he stepped up the pace by adding thousands of laborers to complete the final preparations. To divert the attention of the defenders, the sultan's cannons fired continuous volleys at the entrance to the Horn, creating a smokescreen to hide the activities there.

At dawn the following day, more than seventy Turkish ships, tied to wheeled cradles, were dragged to shore. Teams of oxen harnessed to the bows helped the men pull the vessels over the ridges, to the eerie accompaniment of fifes and drums. The sails of the galleys were fully hoisted, ready for sea, and the oarsmen took their places and pounded out a beat given by officers who paced alongside. The sight of this monstrous flotilla lumbering down the slopes and slithering into the Golden Horn numbed Constantinople's defenders. The city's vulnerable stretch of wall lining the Horn was no longer safe from attack. Having surrounded the capital by land and sea, the Turks again attacked a section of the landward walls, only to be repulsed twice by the desperate Byzantines.

On May 25, the sultan made a proposal for peace: He would spare the city on the condition that its citizens pay an annual

tribute; alternatively, he would provide free passage to safety if they surrendered the city. Both offers were rejected.

The Turks, discouraged that their seven-week siege had not yet succeeded, almost withdrew. But on May 29, the sultan reminded his generals of the prophecies that the Faithful would take the city; he spoke of its treasures, its palaces, its churches filled with silver and gold and precious stones, its fine gardens, its girls and young men. Those who died fighting would enter directly into Paradise. Those who lived would have the traditional three days to pillage the city.

Inside Constantinople, the defenders paraded the bones of saints and golden and jeweled crosses around the city's walls, blessing the soldiers and citizens. Afterward, the emperor addressed his commanders and told them that, like himself, they must be ready to die, but that with God's help, they still might triumph. That evening, he released those who could be spared from the defenses and sent them to the Hagia Sophia for safety. There, everyone took part in what would be the last Christian service to be held in the church that for so long had stood as the symbol and heart of Byzantium's sacred Christian empire. When the service was over, the defenders returned to their posts.

Giustiniani and his men, Italians and Greeks, took up their positions opposite the weak spot of the walls where the attack was expected. As they passed through the inner walls, the gates were locked behind them, making retreat impossible. Later that night the emperor made his final inspection before taking his station.

Shortly before 2 a.m., the assault began. To the cacophony of cymbals, the shrill notes of fifes, the cries of the soldiers, and the thunder of cannons, wave after wave of Turks attacked, only to be beaten back. For a moment, it seemed that the city might again be saved. But by mistake, a small gate had been left open in the outer walls, allowing the Turks entry. Then Giustiniani was wounded; although the emperor begged him not to leave his post, he was carried by his men from the field to a Genoese ship. Many of his troops left with him. Noticing the confusion, the sultan ordered his Janissaries to charge. This time, they were successful. They forced their way over the outer wall and reached the inner wall, where they hoisted a Turkish flag from one of the towers. Constantine XI

Palaiologos, the last of the Byzantine emperors, knew that the end had come. Dismounting his horse, he discarded his royal insignia and flung himself into the hordes of the advancing Janissaries, never to be seen again.

That afternoon, the sultan entered the city, escorted by his bodyguard of Janissaries. The three-day pillage permitted by Islamic tradition was already under way. When he reached the gates of Hagia Sophia, he dismounted and scooped up a handful of earth, which he poured on his turbaned head as an act of humility before the God who had brought him victory. As he entered the deserted halls and galleries of the half-ruined imperial palace, he murmured the words of a Persian poet: "The spider weaves the curtains in the palace of the Caesars; the owl calls the watches in Afrasiab's towers."

With the fall of Constantinople, Byzantium ceased to exist as a political entity. As preserver of the cultural tradition of the ancient Greco-Roman world, and as the bridge between that world and the enlightened world of the Renaissance, Byzantium had fulfilled its historical role. Its mission as an Orthodox Christian state, inspired by the vision of uniting humankind into a single society under the protection of the Cross, had terminated when Constantinople was sacked during the Fourth Crusade. But Byzantium had set its seal of civilization on the whole Balkan world. It survived in the threnes of the Greek ballad-makers, in the memory and ritual of the Orthodox Church, in the patient devotion of village priest or monk from the Holy Mountain of Athos. Some 400 years later, in 1821, the Greeks would rise once more against their Turkish overlords and lay the foundations of the modern Greek kingdom.

One Orthodox Christian state, however, retained its independence. In his singlemindedness to capture Constantinople, the sultan had overlooked Russia, the heir to the mission of Byzantium to convert all to Christianity. Though the sacred Orthodox empire and its emperor had fallen, the mission of both was passed on to Russia.

Dynastically the claim could be supported by the fact that Ivan III of Moscow had married Princess Sophia of the Palaiologos house. But, as with Byzantium itself, the dynastic link was secondary to the ideal of a sacred Christian society under the rule of a single semi-divine emperor.

The theocratic state - an idea inherited from Rome and given a Christian form by Byzantium - lasted until July 16, 1918. On that night, the last Russian Czar, Nicholas II, and his family, were killed by the Bolsheviks at Ekaterinburg. After 1,600 years, the Byzantine political heritage came to an end.



GALLERY



Blue Mosque and Hagia Sofia



Interior, Hagia Sofia



Ceiling, Hagia Sofia



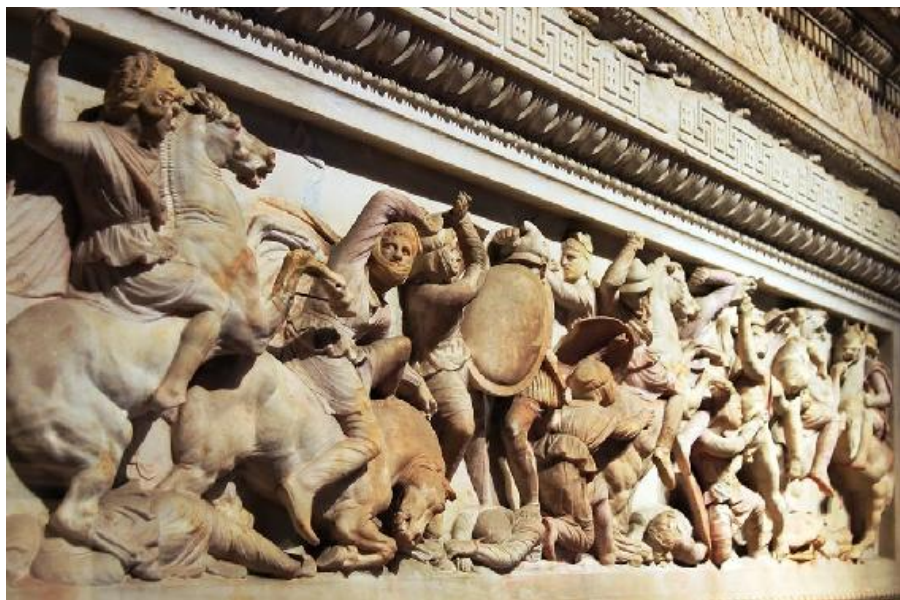
Byzantine Mosaic, Hagia Sofia



Istanbul Archeological Museum



Istanbul Archeological Museum



Alexander's Sarcophagus, Istanbul Archeological Museum



Istanbul Archeological Museum



Istanbul Archeological Museum



Mosaic, Istanbul Archeological Museum



Karnak Obelisk, Istanbul



Byzantine coins



Byzantine cistern, Istanbul



Istanbul's ancient walls



Zeyrek Mosque



Byzantine Mosaic, Istanbul



Façade of the Palace of Constantine, Istanbul



Ruins, Mystras



Ruins, Mystras



Ruins, Mystras



Byzantine Eagle



Monreale Cathedral, Sicily



Monreale Cathedral



Monreale Cathedral



Aachen Cathedral



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